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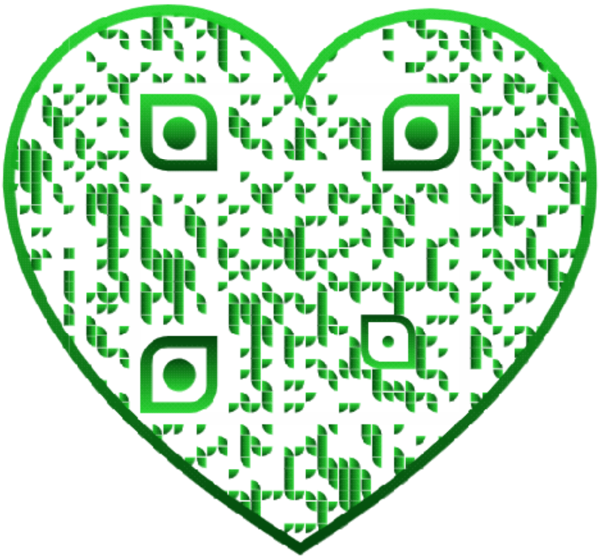

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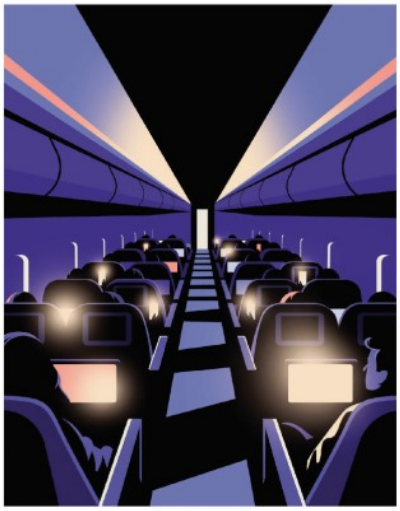

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A look back at *Business Traveller* Awards over the years

EDITOR'S LETTER

I'M SORRY, but how is 2024 over already? At this rate, I'll be retiring in half an hour. I hope it's been a good year for everyone. It's certainly been a good year for travel – record-breaking, in fact, with the industry officially beating pre-pandemic levels. According to WTTC, travel was on track to contribute a whopping US$11.1 trillion to the global economy this year (up from the 2019 peak of US$10.3 trillion), while IATA declared the airline industry has fully recovered and surpassed 2019 levels.

Exciting new cabins took to the skies – turn to page 75 for our review of the new Emirates Boeing 777 business cabin – and there's been some major developments in tech: our feature on page 56 looks at how Starlink is set to revolutionise inflight wifi.

Hotels also continue to multiply at dazzling rates – Marriott opened it's 9,000th (!) property this year (the St. Regis Longboat Key in Florida).

The wellness juggernaut marched on (we've got floating saunas in the UK now – see page 32); sustainability is morphing from corporate buzzword to action (updates on page 22); and luxury moves ever closer to meaningful experiences (on page 39, the CEO of Minor Hotels explains why 'slow travel' is on everyone's lips).

Speaking of winning trends, as you'll have possibly gathered from our Oscars-worthy cover, this issue we reveal who *Business Traveller* readers have crowned as the best in travel for 2024. Turn to page 48 to view the results.

And what about the coming year? Well, if I could predict the future, I'd definitely retire in half an hour. What I can tell you is where our global team of editors have their eyes on. Turn to page 62 to find out which destinations are on our team's travel wish lists for 2025 – and why they should be on yours, too.

Tamsin Cocks

Tamsin Cocks
Editor

CONTRIBUTORS

CHRIS CHAMBERLIN
Chris is an editor for *Points Hacks* in Australia and an award-winning journalist with a penchant for business travel (he's flown over two million kilometres to almost 50 countries). This issue, he reveals why free inflight wifi for all could soon become the reality. Turn to page 56.

DAVID PHELAN
David has written about travel and technology for almost three decades, for publications including *Time Out*, *The Independent*, *Forbes.com* and *Monocle*. He is also an actor, most recently appearing in *Accolade* at the Theatre Royal Windsor. On page 20, he rounds up global business news.

NATHALIE LEES
Nathalie is a London-based freelance illustrator, who has been published in *The Economist, TIME, Le Monde, Die Zeit* and *The New York Times*. Her work aims to distil complex themes and communicate ideas through the use of simple forms and bold colours. Discover her talent on page 56.

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EDITOR TAMSIN COCKS
CREATIVE DIRECTOR TAN PARMAR
DEPUTY EDITOR HANNAH BRANDLER
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PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR TRACEY GRIFFIN
PICTURE EDITOR KATIE BYRNE
CONSUMER EDITOR ALEX MCWHIRTER
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ALICE HENDERSON
SUB-EDITOR AMY ABRAHAMS
CONTRIBUTORS CHRIS CHAMBERLIN, GEMMA GREENWOOD, LAUREL IVES, DAVID PHELAN, ANDREAS SPAETH, RIC STOCKFIS, RICHARD TAMS, JEREMY TAYLOR

ADVERTISING
SALES MANAGER UK AND EUROPE MARC DEVIS
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CREATIVE SOLUTIONS
OWEN BENNETT, DHANESHA SUTARIA, VANESSA KEEN

ADMINISTRATION
CIRCULATION AND PRODUCTION MANAGER JAMIE HALLING

FINANCE MANAGER VINCENT MURPHY

CONTACT
EMAIL EDITORIAL@BUSINESSTRAVELLER.COM
TWITTER.COM/@BTUK
FACEBOOK.COM/BUSINESSTRAVELLER
INSTAGRAM @BUSINESSTRAVELLERUK
ADVERTISING TEL +44 (0)20 7625 0937
EMAIL ADVERTISING@BUSINESSTRAVELLER.COM

SUBSCRIPTIONS
TEL +44 (0)20 8132 9270
EMAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS@BUSINESSTRAVELLER.COM

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER MICHAEL KEATING
CHIEF OPERATING AND FINANCIAL OFFICER JIM CAMPBELL
MANAGING DIRECTOR, INK STUDIO JONNY CLARK
HEAD OF FINANCE PHIL MCILWAINE
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ACCOUNT LEAD JADE SMITH
DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND INNOVATION RIC STOCKFIS

Ink

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INK, BLACKBURN HOUSE, BLACKBURN RD, NW6 1RZ

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Inbox

Readers share first-hand knowledge, experiences and ideas

PASSPORT PROBLEMS

As a cabin crew member with a major airline flying between Europe and the US, I've noticed a lot of travellers have passport issues. Make sure your passport has at least six months validity before booking travel. Don't count on the gate or ticket agent of the airline to verify it for you. I've also found passports in airline and airport bathrooms, while seats onboard are notorious for eating everything from ear buds to passports. A passenger once placed his passport on the seat while putting his bags away during boarding. Needless to say, a slight move and jolt, voilà – your passport is gone. There are pickpockets and thieves about everywhere, even on aeroplanes.

On a flight to China, a young woman put her passport in a Starbucks bag and inadvertently gave it to us for final trash pick-up. She approached us as we were walking to customs to tell us we threw out her passport. Needless to say, we sent her back to the plane with the agent to dig through the trash. We also had a passenger leave his passport in the seatback pocket. Pay attention to all your belongings before leaving the aircraft. The more attentive you are, the less stress you'll have on your business trip or vacation. ***Byron Sutherland, New Hampshire***

STAR LETTER

Praise where praise is due

I read about Jeffrey Carswell's poor experience with Lufthansa and KLM regarding seat selection refunds in November's Inbox page.

By contrast, we had a stellar experience with Emirates a few weeks ago returning from Cape Town to Dublin via Dubai. We booked and paid for a pair of seats at the back of the aircraft for each leg. However, a disastrous assisted transfer through DXB on our outbound journey had me very worried for our return leg as we had just 90 minutes between flights. I emailed my travel agent to ask her Emirates account manager for help.

Emirates switched our seats from Row 47 to Row 17 and were waiting for us when we disembarked. We were over at our gate within 20 minutes and received a refund from Emirates for those seats within a week. A fantastic customer experience!

Aoife Ryan, Wicklow

TIMOTHY
LONDON

STAR PRIZE

This month's Star Letter writer will receive a *Business Traveller*-branded Timothy Spirit carry-on case. For your chance to win, email editorial@businesstraveller.com and include your full postal address and phone number. We reserve the right to edit letters.

CUT THE QUEUE

Land, grab the bag, get the car. Simple, right? Well, my recent experience with Avis at Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) shattered that illusion. Picture this: I arrive at the counter, weary from a long flight, only to find a line that could rival a theme park on a holiday weekend. Apparently, rental cars at Avis are now an endangered species – a two-hour wait for a vehicle. And I was one of the lucky ones, thanks to my President's Club status. The average Joe? Still waiting.

Oh, did I mention I was travelling with an 18-month-old? Two hours of pacifying a toddler in a crowded rental office isn't exactly how I pictured starting my trip.

Now, here's the kicker: while 100 of us waited, baffled by the shortage of cars in real life, Avis was still happily taking reservations online. You could book a car for DFW at that very moment! Magic, I guess. Maybe it was renting out imaginary cars by then.

After a fruitless discussion with customer service (surprise!), I took to Twitter, where I found similar horror stories. Avis, where "We Try Harder" has morphed into "We Try… Eventually".

So, fellow travellers, beware. If you're renting from Avis, pack some snacks and a lot of patience. And if you're travelling with a toddler? Well, good luck!

Andrew Grosset, Chertsey

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FORUM

HEATHROW EXPRESS HAS DECLINING PASSENGER NUMBERS, WHILE THE ELIZABETH LINE REPORTS STRONG GROWTH

AMCWHIRTER
Heathrow Express (HEX) is losing passengers faster than any other UK rail operator, facing competition from the Elizabeth Line and its lower fares. It was recently reported that the Lizzy Line increased passenger carryings by 40% from 2022 to 2023

MARTYNSINCLAIR
I am London-based and can count on one hand how many times I have used HEX. Prices and Paddington were enough to put me off. With the Elizabeth Line, I now use the underground for most of my Heathrow visits. Getting an Uber/Bolt from Heathrow generally involves a 20-30 minute wait, by which time the Elizabeth Line has got you into the West End. Any sensible London-bound passenger would use the Elizabeth Line.

TRANSTRAXMAN
Is it not time for Heathrow Express to give up the ghost and call it a day? If the purpose of such a train link is to connect unconnected destinations then the logical "missing link" is from Heathrow to Stansted. Linking two of London´s big airports makes tremendous sense. The problem is how to do it. Merging Heathrow Express with Stansted Express and the Lizzy line might be the best solution. An added advantage would be freeing up, at least, two platforms at Paddington and Liverpool Street for other services – be them intercity, regional or commuter lines. Now is the time to make the move.

TIMFITZGERALDTC
I think London Gatwick and Heathrow need a direct rail connection before Stansted and Heathrow.

SWISSDIVER
I liked HEX for its roomy business class with large seats. But it chose to reduce the comfort at about the same time the Elizabeth Line arrived. So now it is a no brainer: Elizabeth Line it is, with a substantial saving.

CHEERUP
The Elizabeth Line is quick, clean, efficient and connects to more stations with National Rail traffic – which all add up to higher demand. It also looks to be half the price of HEX.

> 'Is it not time for Heathrow Express to give up the ghost and call it a day?'

NICK PIKE
The Elizabeth Line is a revelation. So much better than every other train line in London. It's fabulous getting to Bond Street from Liverpool Street in 15 minutes and to Canary Wharf in even less time.

X2000TRAVELLER
Remember that the Elizabeth Line has been unreliable and also only offers two trains per hour to T5, with a further two connections per hour by changing onto HEX at Heathrow Central Area (Terminal 2/3) – the connection between there and T5 is free – getting in about seven minutes ahead of the next fast Lizzy train.

I've had to get a bus from Hayes and Harlington to the Central Area when the Elizabeth Line had delays. Because of the layout of the Great Western route, if HEX vanished and the Elizabeth Line (hypothetically) took over the four fast trains per hour to Paddington, these trains would have to terminate at Paddington and couldn't feed into the tunnel. There's not enough capacity to allow the fast lines to connect across in that way.

ADAMMARLEY
The Elizabeth Line is a victim of its own success in rush hour. Current trains arrive packed with travellers and luggage, right when local residents are trying to get to work. Frequently people are left on the platform.

I have no idea about the complexities of scheduling trains on railways, but it would be a real relief if HEX were made to give up its four slots each way every hour and they could be given over to the Elizabeth Line to ease congestion.

HEX staff also try to flog unsuspecting tourists full price tickets before they get into the T5 arrivals hall and find out that the Elizabeth Line is much cheaper.

HEX has had a good run, but it's time to move aside.

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Dispatch

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HOT TICKET

High profile in Davos

World leaders and ski enthusiasts alike converge in this Swiss alpine town for the winter season

WORDS **HANNAH BRANDLER**

IMAGE **NICO SCHAERER**

HOME OF BUSINESS AT ALTITUDE, Davos hosts the influential annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) every January, which assembles global leaders, delegates from major international organisations and the occasional celebrity to discuss everything from geopolitics to artificial intelligence and sustainability (cue headlines reporting the hypocrisy of those jetting in by private planes).

The big news in 2025 is WEF's increase in the admission price for second-tier attendees – ie the entourage of official participants – from

Continued from overleaf

ZURICH
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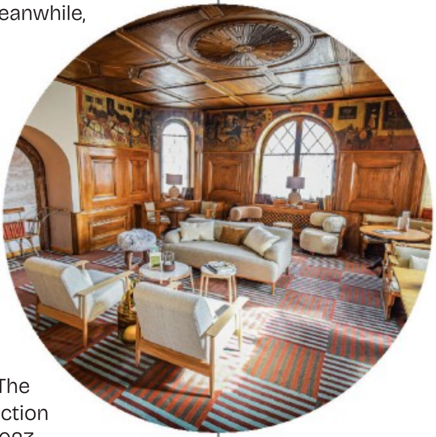
CHF100 (£87) to CHF1,000 (£887).

But it's not all work, there's plenty of winter treats for visitors to enjoy. Hit the ski slopes at Jakobshorn and Parsenn, ring in New Year's Day with the Hotschrennen pig race in neighbouring Klosters, or watch ice hockey at the 96th edition of the Spengler Cup – the oldest international tournament of its kind (26-31 December). Music enthusiasts, meanwhile, can head to the Songbird Festival Davos – a celebration of national singer-songwriters, taking place from 6-21 December. In hotel news, the Hotel Flüela Davos joined Hyatt's The Unbound Collection in December 2023. Situated 1,560 metres above sea level, and a three-minute stroll from Parsenn Ski Lift, the hotel features 51 sumptuous rooms, a private ski locker, plus an expansive spa to restore sore muscles. Hotel Grischa, meanwhile, boasts fine dining fare – from the Mediterranean-inspired Apollo, to upscale Chinese cuisine at the Golden Dragon restaurant.



DID YOU KNOW?
Davos is the first Swiss resort with a net-zero target, aiming to reach the milestone by 2030

TOP: The annual Spengler Cup
BOTTOM: The traditional Post Bar & Lounge at Hotel Flüela Davos

IMAGE MARC BERENDSEN; HYATT; QATAR AIRWAYS LIMITED; GUVEN OZDEMIR, PETER UNGER/GETTY

First class updates

Loyal travellers benefit as Lufthansa launches private suites that will initially be invitation-only

LUFTHANSA HAS launched its long-awaited Allegris first class suites, initially operating on flights to Bengaluru and Mumbai.

The carrier had intended to introduce the product alongside its new business, premium economy and economy seating, which launched in May, but delays led to the first Allegris-fitted A350 aircraft entering service without a first class cabin.

The first class cabin features just two individual suites and a "globally unique" Suite Plus, with two seats that convert into a double bed, plus features including near-ceiling-high walls and a lockable sliding door.

To begin with, the suites are being offered by invitation-only to its "most loyal guests", with targeted upgrades and then bookings being made available as more aircraft with Allegris First Class enter service.

Meanwhile, Singapore Airlines has announced plans for an all-new first class cabin on its fleet of A350-900 Ultra Long Range (ULR) aircraft, as part of a wider S$1.1 billion retrofit programme.

The carrier's seven A350-900 ULRs will have four first class seats, with the first retrofitted aircraft to enter service in 2027.

> Allegris seats are almost one metre wide and can be heated or cooled

WORDS
**HANNAH BRANDLER,
MARK CASWELL**

ROUTE ROUND-UP

TOP: Emirates returns to the Scottish capital **BOTTOM:** Qantas is planning flights between Brisbane and Manila

TAIL OFF

British Airways
is set to suspend flights to Bahrain and Kuwait from the end of March 2025, due to ongoing maintenance issues with its Boeing 787 Rolls-Royce engines

Virgin Atlantic
has postponed its return to Accra – a route that had been scheduled to relaunch on 1 May, 2025

TAKE OFF

Emirates
has resumed daily flights between Dubai and Edinburgh after a hiatus of more than four years, complementing the carrier's existing route to Glasgow

Korean Air
will launch a thrice-weekly service between Seoul Incheon and Fuzhou on 28 December, operated by a two-class Boeing 737

Cathay Pacific
has relaunched flights between Hong Kong and Riyadh, with a thrice-weekly service operated by the carrier's A350-900

British Airways
has resumed flights to Bangkok for the first time since 2020, with flights now departing from Gatwick rather than the previous Heathrow

Qantas
has launched a four-times-weekly route between Brisbane and Manila, operated by the carrier's two-class A330-200 aircraft

NEW LOOK

Short-haul chic

Finnair unveils revamped cabins on its Embraer 190 aircraft

FINNAIR HAS UNVEILED the first of its revamped Embraer 190 aircraft, complete with new seats, lighter materials and LED lighting. The aircraft are operated by Nordic Regional Airlines, with the new cabins set to be flown from Edinburgh, Manchester and Dublin to Helsinki.

The new design features the dark blue and grey colours currently showcased in its redesigned long-haul cabins and non-Schengen lounges at Helsinki Airport.

Business class seats in rows 1-9 include recline functionality of about seven centimetres and increased cushioning, while seats in rows 10-25 have a pre-set recline and a design "aimed at maximising comfort on short hops across Europe".

The aircraft also has a movable class divider, so the size of business class can be adjusted if necessary.

> The use of lightweight materials has resulted in an aircraft that weighs around 150kg less than previously

WORDS
MARK CASWELL

New hotel openings

MANCHESTER

ONLY THE second UK property under Accor's midscale lifestyle brand, the 412-room TRIBE Manchester Airport is located around 400 metres from the airport's Terminal 2. The £80 million development features rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows and Nespresso machines, while public areas include Italian-inspired TRIBE Table restaurant, as well as a bar, coffee shop corner and fitness centre.

NEW YORK

Four Seasons Hotel New York has reopened its doors for the first time since summer 2020. The 52-storey New York hotel is located between Madison and Park Avenues on 57th Street, in an area known as Billionaires' Row. A selection of rooms are currently available across multiple room categories, with the full collection of suites set to reopen in 2025. There are also plans to debut extended-stay accommodations, with one, two and three bedrooms, and terraces.

BARCELONA

ENNISMORE'S SLS brand makes its European debut in December, with a 471-room property in Barcelona's Port Fòrum waterside district. The hotel has a total of three pools and six F&B options, including an all-day dining Mediterranean restaurant, a tapas bar and a rooftop pool bar and club, as well as a spa and 770 sqm ballroom.

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All-access pass to Manchester's VIP terminal

MANCHESTER AIRPORT is giving all passengers the option of an exclusive private terminal experience with the opening of aether.

A first for the UK, passengers can buy entry to the terminal – regardless of their ticket type. Three packages include 'Express', 'Inclusive with Cabin Bags', and 'Inclusive + Checked Bags', with various benefits ranging from queue jumping to complimentary food and beverages.

Pre-Covid, the terminal existed under the name PremiAir, but has since been renovated. Interiors now offer a contemporary, calming feel, with clean white walls, warm wood panelling, upholstered leather seating and panoramic runway views. Menus meanwhile have been curated and designed by acclaimed chef Adam Reid.

The terminal is located near the Runway Visitor Park and, naturally, chauffeur-driven cars are on hand to assist with transfers to and from gates. Book ahead to secure your spot, with prices ranging from £90 to £170 per person.

TRAIN-
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Who let the dogs out?

Fancy a quick pre-train pint? Scottish brewery and pub chain BrewDog has opened a 175-seat bar at Edinburgh Waverley Station. Up to 16 of the company's craft beers are on offer, along with a list of wines and cocktails from its BrewDog Distilling Co Wonderland brand. Craft beer fans will also find a BrewDog bar at Edinburgh Airport, while those passing through London will find branded bars at London Gatwick Airport and London Waterloo station.

All aboard to Amsterdam

EUROSTAR'S DIRECT Amsterdam-London route will be back up and running in February 2025.

The service came to a halt in June to make way for renovations at Amsterdam Centraal Station, which meant border controls could not take place in the Dutch hub. Passengers therefore have to disembark in Brussels for passport control and security checks before onward travel to London St Pancras.

When the service resumes on 10 February, the Amsterdam-London trains will be able to carry 440 passengers – 165 more people than the previous capacity. This is thanks to increased space at the newly renovated Dutch hub. Eurostar says that it eventually plans to transport 700 people on each service.

Gwendoline Cazenave, CEO of Eurostar, said: "Eurostar is fully committed to a bright future in the Netherlands and we thank our partners NS and ProRail for their work with us to ensure direct services to London could return, and those to Paris and Brussels could continue."

IMAGES EUROSTAR; COURTESY OF BREWDOG; TOBY MITCHELL; WE THE FOOD SNOBS

Festive flights

Holiday travel can often be stressful, with long queues and eye-watering prices. New insights from travel search engine KAYAK reveal the best days to travel – and when to avoid

The good

If you're happy to skip the turkey sandwiches, travelling on Boxing Day and New Year's Eve could represent flight savings of 24% and 28%, respectively. Alternatively, flights to Europe are 22% cheaper on 16 December, while 29 December is looking quiet on the domestic flight front.

The bad

Avoid travel on 20 December and 4 January, as these are predicted to be the busiest travel days, with flights 24% and 30% more expensive than other dates during the period.

The unexpected

Average flight prices during this year's holiday period were estimated to be 3% cheaper than last year.

Travel trends in 2025

What's driving change in the industry? We explore five trends that will shape your travels in the year ahead

Solo travel

AS BUSINESS TRAVELLERS, we're no strangers to travelling alone. But we're increasingly taking the solo route on our leisure trips too. Skyscanner claims 54% of people are considering it based on search habits, while the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) found the biggest surge was among those aged 35-44, with solo traveller numbers more than doubling to 13% in 2023. So, where should you go on your lonesome?

JAPAN: Safe, easy to navigate, and friendly to all budgets (particularly with the yen currently weak against the dollar), there's plenty of reasons to visit Japan in 2025. Add in a rich culture that spans everything from slurping ramen in the heart of Ginza to wasabi-hunting in the forest, and this remains a top choice for the year to come.

ARGENTINA: For solo adventurers, Argentina is a tempting proposition. Intrepid explorers can ride horseback through scenic Mendozan vineyards, explore the rich history and culture of Córdoba, and discover the lively social scene in Buenos Aires.

NEW ZEALAND: The country's stunning landscape is a dream for nature lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. With 13 national parks there's every kind of outdoor activity you can imagine, from kayaking to bungee jumping. Meet fellow travellers in Queenstown's lively bar scene, and zip around the country with efficient public transport and solid infrastructure.

PORTUGAL: Digital nomads have already claimed Lisbon as their own, thanks to its glorious weather, attractive beaches, vibrant cafe and coworking culture, plus delicious Portuguese cuisine (pastel de nata, anyone?). Single travellers will find a welcoming community, and plenty of pursuits to suit their solo status – from surfing to golfing.

TICKET FOR ONE Solo travellers are on the rise, with Japan (top) emerging as a favourite destination alongside Lisbon in Portugal (bottom)

Evolution of loyalty programmes

According to Chris Ross, Chief Brand Officer – Priority Pass, 2025 will be the year of experiential loyalty, evolving around six key pillars

MICRO-EXPERIENCES: Using data to drive curated and personalised surprise-and-delight moments.

EVENT EXPERIENCES: Preferential access, special events and unique perspectives.

SERVICE EXPERIENCES: Recognising the individual by name, remembering their interests and preferences – essentially making loyalty truly customer-centric.

GAMIFIED EXPERIENCES: Creating high-frequency engagement challenges with immediate earn/ response cycles.

DIGITAL EXPERIENCES: Immersive, personalised virtual experiences using advanced VR and AR technology and interfaces.

SOCIAL IMPACT EXPERIENCES: Brands should have meaning and impact beyond their core product. Loyalty is a useful place to express this, as more programmes drive engagement with benefits and rewards in the social and sustainability spaces.

SOURCES:
*Global Markets Insights, Sports Tourism Market Forecast 2024 – 2032;
**Custom Market Insights, Global Music Tourism Market 2024–2033

> “The new loyalty paradigm of immediacy, utility and relevance means that customers are not only expecting a wide range of options for benefits and rewards, but they also need to be meaningful (relevance)”

IMAGES TIANSHU LIU ON UNSPLASH; GETTY

Sport and music tourism by numbers

Research from Priority Pass shows the demand for travel linked to sports and music is set to continue

$564 billion*

Sport tourism was worth US$564 billion in 2023 and is expected to rise to US$1.3 trillion in 2032.

$13.8 billion**

Music tourism is anticipated to reach a value of US$13.8 billion by 2032.

Sydney

is the top city for sport or music events, followed by London, Barcelona, Paris, Dubai and New York.

Football

is the sport most people travel to see (69%), followed by basketball (27%), the Olympics and Formula 1 (26%) and tennis (21%).

84%

of fans travelling internationally visited a new destination, and 30% plan to return.

38%

of event travellers would choose a payment card with perks such as travel packages and travel insurance, while 33% desire airport lounge access.

The Gate Escape

Avgeeks have gone mainstream. According to Booking.com’s *Travel reinvented: 2025 Travel Predictions,* more than one third of travellers (particularly Gen Z and Millennials) would be interested in visiting a location simply because of its airport. Meanwhile, Priority Pass data reveals lounge visits will increase by more than 50% from 2023 to 2025.

Technological transformation

NEW TECHNOLOGICAL solutions from AI to wifi connectivity (see feature on page 56) will continue to revolutionise the travel experience in 2025, with the customer as the ultimate winner.

How will this manifest in airport lounges? In terms of back-end operations, new Priority Pass Lounge Management Systems (LMS) will enhance the guest experience while streamlining capacity management, featuring pre-book capabilities, digital waitlists, and real-time flight tracking. Lounges will also be able to manage services such as massages, showers, and co-working spaces.

At the other end of the scale, robot waiters are now serving drinks at the Hacienda Santa Lucia by The Grand Lounge Elite in Felipe Angeles International Airport, Mexico – winner of the Priority Pass 2024 Pioneer of the Year Award. These machine assistants have also made their way into lounges in New York JFK and Washington DC Dulles International.

WORDS
DAVID PHELAN

PERSONAL FINANCE

Fraudsters target Revolut

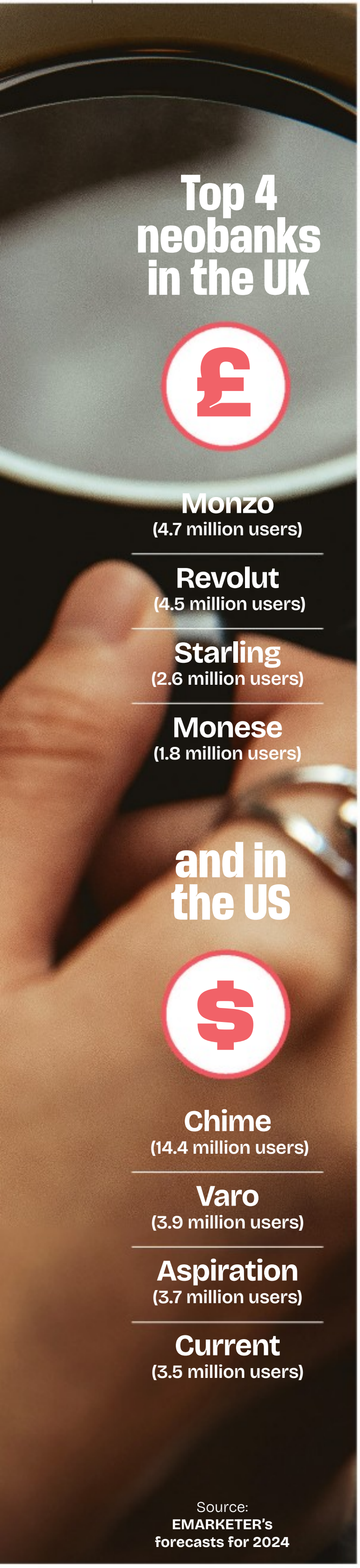
The online neobank has been hit by a string of fraudulent attacks that have seen individuals lose up to £165,000

LAUNCHED IN 2015, Revolut currently has ten million customers in the UK, and 45 million worldwide. All customers conduct their banking online via an app, with zero physical branches available.

According to Action Fraud, Revolut was named in more reports of fraud in 2023 than any other major UK bank. For every £1 million paid into Revolut accounts last year, £756 came through Authorised Push Payment fraud – that's ten times the amount of Barclays Bank, for example.

Scams have involved fraudsters posing as Revolut to trick customers into sharing security codes over the phone and installing malware on their devices to access digital wallets.

The company has since buffed up its defences, with an additional layer of biometric protection put in place.



Top 4 neobanks in the UK

£

Monzo
(4.7 million users)

Revolut
(4.5 million users)

Starling
(2.6 million users)

Monese
(1.8 million users)

and in the US

$

Chime
(14.4 million users)

Varo
(3.9 million users)

Aspiration
(3.7 million users)

Current
(3.5 million users)

Source:
EMARKETER's forecasts for 2024

Birmingham Curzon Street

PICTURED The entrance to HS2 station, Birmingham Curzon Street

UPDATE

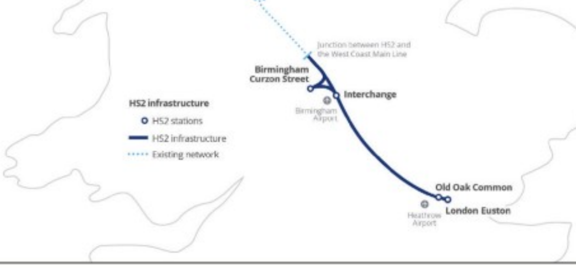
HS2 and fro

The saga of the high-speed rail line bisecting England continues, with spiralling costs and further U-turn decisions.

After the bombshell news of the Birmingham to Manchester leg being scrapped in 2023, an 'HS2 light' project is now being discussed to add capacity to the north.

In October, Transport Secretary Louise Haigh said ministers would be stepping in to manage the budget – which some have warned could rise to £66 billion. (In November, it emerged £100 million has been spent on a "shed" to protect bats on a 1km stretch of track.)

The Chancellor meanwhile has confirmed the southern terminus won't be Old Oak Common, but will move to Euston in central London. A 4.5-mile tunnel will run the last part of the way, at a cost of around £6.5 billion. But don't expect to see that any time before 2041.


Junction between HS2 and the West Coast Main Line
Birmingham Curzon Street
Interchange
Birmingham Airport
HS2 infrastructure
HS2 stations
HS2 infrastructure
Existing network
Old Oak Common
London Euston
Heathrow Airport

IMAGES HS2.ORG.UK; PETER DAZELEY/GETTY

UK ECONOMY

Budget high (low?) lights

KEY AMONG the announcements in the UK Budget, published in October, was a rise in the level of National Insurance contributions from employers. This rose from 13.8% to 15%, while the threshold has dropped to apply to earnings above £5,000 a year (previously this was £9,100). At the same time, the national minimum wage was raised from £11.44 to £12.21 an hour.

Income tax rates were not increased, but a sting in the tail is that the income thresholds for each tax rate have been frozen, so if your wages go above the old threshold, you'll be paying a higher rate of tax. However, from 2028, thresholds will rise in line with prices.

Travel costs are also affected. Air passenger duty (APD) will increase from 1 April, 2025 by £2 for the cheapest seats on short-haul international flights and £6 on pricier tickets. From 1 April 2026, standard rate tickets will rise by another £4 to £32, while seats that aren't basic economy will rise from £84 to £142.

The APD for a business class flight of over 2,000 miles, currently £581, will rise to £1,097 in 2026.

WORDS
HANNAH BRANDLER

2030
HELSINKI AIMS TO ACHIEVE CARBON NEUTRALITY

30km
OF NEW TRAMWAYS WILL BE ADDED IN THE NEXT DECADE

30%
OF THE BUS FLEET IN THE HELSINKI REGION IS ELECTRIC

Top of the charts

Helsinki has been granted first place in the latest Global Destination Sustainability Index

MARRYING TRAVEL with sustainability is always a challenge, but the latest Global Destination Sustainability (GDS) Index can help travellers make more conscious destination choices.

The GDS Index highlights the top 40 sustainable destinations around the world, basing its rankings on a city's commitment to sustainable tourism, environmental stewardship and community wellbeing. This year saw new and more demanding criteria – a focus on regenerative tourism, circular economy practices and enhanced climate action.

Rising from fourth place in 2023, Helsinki has secured top place in the ranking, having increased its share of renewable energy in heat and electricity production, enhancing energy efficiency measures in buildings and promoting sustainable tourism.

Sweden's Gothenburg fell to second place, while Copenhagen came third. In the UK, Belfast and Glasgow were ranked ninth and 12th. New to the list are Victoria (22) and Quebec City (37) in Canada, Limerick (38) and Dublin (29) in Ireland, and Denmark's Horsens (39).

Leading the way

BIOPHILIC INTERIORS are pleasing to the eye but they also serve the planet. Doha's Hamad International Airport's central concourse – home to the indoor tropical garden ORCHARD – has received LEED Gold certification for its eco efforts. The central concourse was designed to use 30% less energy and 55% less water.

DID YOU KNOW?
LEED stands for Leaders in Energy and Environmental Design. It is a globally recognised certification and green building rating system.

Earn your eco stripes

PAUL SMITH'S TRADEMARK stripes have found a new sustainable home, partnering with Brighton-based design studio gomi, which focuses on circular lifespans and reducing the need for raw materials. Waste plastic from Paul Smith's supply chain has been transformed into Bluetooth speakers (£330) and power banks (£95). The stripes take on a unique psychedelic, molten-style pattern, thanks to the plastic moulding process. Charge two devices simultaneously with the portable charger, and relax with water-resistant speakers by the pool.

IMAGES COURTESY OF HIA; JULIA KIVELA/VISIT FINLAND

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Nobody's perfect*

2024 MotoGP™ Race Winners

Qatar	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Portugal	**Ducati**	Martín
Americas	**Aprilia**	Viñales
Spain	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
France	**Ducati**	Martín
Catalunya	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Italy	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
The Netherlands	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Germany	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
United Kingdom	**Ducati**	Bastianini
Austria	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Aragon	**Ducati**	Márquez
San Marino	**Ducati**	Márquez
Emilia Romagna	**Ducati**	Bastianini
Indonesia	**Ducati**	Martín
Japan	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Australia	**Ducati**	Márquez
Thailand	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Malaysia	**Ducati**	Bagnaia
Solidarity Grand Prix	**Ducati**	Bagnaia

Ducati's results in the 2024 MotoGP™ World Championship will forever remain in history.
A championship that sees the greatest motorcycle manufacturers compete and is the ultimate expression of technology applied to the world of two wheels. It is a result born of the same talent combined with method and dedication that we apply in the development and design of the series product, proudly taking Made in Italy engineering all over the world.
A success that we share with all the fans who have this sport in their hearts.
Thanks to the "Fantastic Four" who have exalted us with their incredible races: Martín, Bagnaia, Márquez, Bastianini.
Congratulations to Jorge Martín for being the best and becoming World Champion
and to Francesco Bagnaia for fighting hard every lap until the end.
Thanks to all the women and men of Ducati Corse who make the Ducati dream continue.

---

*Inspired by Porsche 1983 Le Mans Results Celebration

MotoGP 2024 RIDERS' WORLD CHAMPION

MotoGP 2024 CONSTRUCTORS' WORLD CHAMPION

MotoGP 2024 TEAMS' WORLD CHAMPION

Explore

Eat, drink, shop, relax

EXTRA DAY

Singapore

Explore the Lion City's fascinating heritage, food and culture

WORDS
ALICE HENDERSON

IMAGES **SIM HENG EE**

CHINATOWN

In 1822, as part of his Raffles Town Plan, British coloniser Stamford Raffles split Singapore into several districts and allocated each to a different ethnicity. A large area to the west of Singapore River was marked for Chinese migrants. Today, Chinatown's Temple Street is lined with gift shops selling porcelain and jaunty chopstick rests in various designs – from varnished ducks to silvery dragons. Overhead are strings of red lanterns and alluring neon signs that mark restaurants. Parallel running Pagoda Street is a vibrant spot too, with powder-coloured →

shophouses and, at the far junction, Sri Mariamman Temple. It's the oldest Hindu temple in Singapore, and a site to see for its *gopuram* – the entrance tower of a temple, and in this case, an elaborate five-tier pyramid lined with bright sculptures. Look out for Buddha Tooth Relic Temple and Thian Hock Keng Temple too, which are both close-by.

HAJI LANE
Kampong Glam is another district that was assigned by Stamford Raffles, this one to the Muslim community and ethnic Arab settlers. At its centre lies the narrow but animated Haji Lane. Here, it's a bohemian collection of curated thrift shops, streetwear boutiques, pastel stationery stores, bars and cafes that take precedence over the more traditional holdings – largely tailors and textile merchants – in the surrounding streets. A younger crowd gravitates here, but heritage is not far away. Sultan Mosque heads up the area with its two golden domes and arabesque moulded facades. It's open to the public, but access is restricted during prayer times.

CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS Singapore's Chinatown (top) is a vibrant enclave to explore; discover all sorts of culinary offerings in the city's hawker centres

> 'Hawker centres are a key aspect of Singaporean food culture: open-plan and sometimes open-air'

KOON SENG ROAD
Soft green, opal blue and lilac. Koon Seng Road, in the residential conservation area of Joo Chiat, is lined with Peranakan shophouses in pearly hues and white blossom trees. Though the road is residential, it's widely regarded as a cultural landmark for people to view from the street. Peranakan families settled in the neighbourhood in the early 1900s, and built the majority of the shophouses shortly after, in the 1920s and 1930s. (In Singapore, Peranakan refers primarily to those born in the former Straits Settlements, generally with mixed Chinese, Malay and Indonesian heritage.) Common features of the two- and three-storey shophouses include intricate fronts with curling floral designs, bright ceramic tiles and shuttered windows.

HELIX BRIDGE
For a sweeping view of the skyline lit-up at night, head to Helix Bridge. The pedestrian walkway links Marina Centre with Marina South and extends over the Singapore River. DNA strands inspired the design, hence the double-helix-like tendrils that wrap around the metal platform. From the viewing platform on the western flank, spy the three prongs of Marina Bay Sands as well as the changing colours of the ArtScience Museum's lotus petals.

LAU PA SAT
Hawker centres are a key aspect of Singaporean food culture: open-plan and sometimes open-air food halls, with multiple cuisines. Lau Pa Sat, which translates to 'old market' in Chinese, is the oldest food court in Singapore and close to the financial district. Try Indian biryani served on a banana leaf, olive fried rice (a plant-based take on egg-fried rice), Vietnamese pho or even Kaya toast (toast with butter and coconut jam) if you're here for breakfast. BT

IMAGES CHERYL CHAN, JOHN SEATON CALLAHAN/GETTY

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Raise a glass

The Savoy sparkles with a new dining destination, plus a dedicated scone shop

HOT ON THE HEELS of its 135th anniversary, The Savoy opened a new dining destination at the end of November, complete with dazzling interiors by London-based design studio BradyWilliams. The all-day Gallery takes the space of the former Thames Foyer, set beneath the existing stained-glass cupola ceiling but with new design details including swathes of marble, fluted glass, gold-embossed mirrors, plus leather and patterned upholstery in shades of soft pink, ochre and tan.

Menus pay homage to Auguste Escoffier, the head chef at The Savoy when it first opened, and include traditional recipes with a modern twist. Examples include Cornish lobster rolls with Marie Rose, a Savoy-style croque monsieur with truffle, plus the hotel's famous Arnold Bennett omelette – first created in 1929. For dessert, guests can expect ice cream sundaes made tableside, as well as Kent apple crumble.

That's not all. The hotel has also opened its very own scone shop, fittingly named Scoff, with both traditional and creative takes on the British delicacy.

TOP DISH A charcoal-grilled organic chicken tikka pie

'The 50-seat ABar Rooftop offers scintillating cityscape views'

WORDS
HANNAH BRANDLER

Refined rooftop

Mandarin Oriental Mayfair debuts its sky-high bar

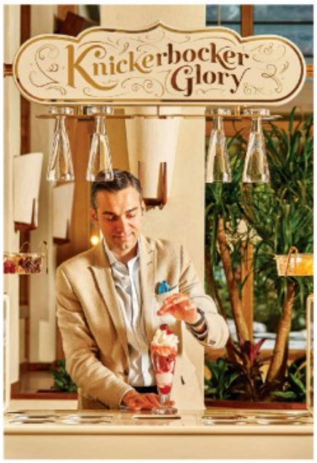
MANDARIN ORIENTAL MAYFAIR is celebrating its debut winter season with a new rooftop bar, helmed by Akira Back – the chef behind the hotel's existing F&B venues. Accessible by private lift, the 50-seat ABar Rooftop offers scintillating cityscape views thanks to its floor-to-ceiling windows and outdoor terrace. Guests can embrace their favourite season regardless of the time of year with cocktails divided by Aki (autumn), Fuyu (winter), Haru (spring) and Natsu (summer) – including creative concoctions such as an artichoke-infused whisky and thyme number. Soak up the spirits with bites ranging from salmon poke bowls to Wagyu burgers and sushi tacos – while DJ sets fill the skies from 7pm-11pm, Thursday-Saturday.

TROLLEY SERVICE

Tableside-made creations are increasingly cropping up at London's top restaurants

Negroni know-how

The London outpost of Los Angeles joint LAVO has introduced a negroni trolley to give guests a taste of the action. Located at The BoTree hotel in Marylebone, the Italian restaurant handcrafts the cocktails tableside, combining a Campari core with your choice of base (gin, vodka, bourbon, rum, tequila, whisky and mezcal), essence (Antica Formula, Vermouth Del Professore Rosso, or 1757 Vermouth di Torino GI Rosso) and finally a finish of grapefruit, coffee, chocolate or rhubarb. To top it off, customers will be gifted a Negroni pin to mark the moment.



Scream for sundaes

Chef Tom Sellers keeps things playful with a pair of Knickerbocker glory trolleys at Dovetale, the restaurant at 1 Hotel Mayfair. Prepare for nostalgia with this 1930s dessert, and spot guests getting giddy with excitement at the handmade ice creams and toppings galore – pick from marshmallows and candied pecans. The sundaes set you back £18, but don't come close to the £55,000 price tag of the brass trolleys. Nicknamed Apollo 11 and 13, the trolleys have been designed by Seymourpowell, a London-based agency behind the interiors of Virgin Galactic spaceships.

Bon appétit

Maison François might be set in the capital's St James's district, but the restaurant's French cuisine and savoir-faire transports you overseas. Its tableside 'à la minute' preparation of steak tartare sees chefs combine beef with a signature spice mix and a scattering of traditional accompaniments – from capers, shallots, cornichons and fresh chives to Tabasco and Worcestershire sauce condiments. Finish it off with crunchy anchovy breadcrumbs and the house seed mix – or succumb to indulgence and enjoy it served on rich bone marrow. The trolley itself is a sight to behold, crafted by Rewthink from sustainable wood and brass.

MAISON FRANÇOIS

IMAGES STEVEN JOYCE; MILO BROWN; JACK HARDY

SPONSORED CONTENT

Meet in Malta

This Mediterranean jewel is the perfect choice for meetings, conferences and unforgettable events in 2025

THE STUNNING ARCHIPELAGO of Malta lies between Sicily and North Africa. Combining first-class facilities, a rich cultural heritage, breathtaking natural beauty, and a climate that promises nearly 300 days of sunshine each year, Malta has positioned itself as a top choice for companies looking to elevate their corporate gatherings. Here's why Malta should be on your radar for business events, luxury incentives and wellness retreats.

Spectacular scenery

Malta's natural beauty is one of its greatest assets, offering an abundance of breathtaking outdoor venues for events, team-building activities, and leisure pursuits. Imagine hosting an elegant cocktail reception overlooking the azure waters of the Mediterranean, or a gala dinner with the stunning backdrop of Valletta's historic skyline. From rugged cliffs to serene beaches, Malta has the perfect setting for any event. After meetings are concluded, delegates can enjoy the country's exceptional hiking, biking, and water-based activities, with options from sailing to kayaking and diving.

Cutting-edge facilities

Malta isn't just beautiful; it's also home to state-of-the-art conference facilities. The Mediterranean Conference Centre, located in the heart of Valletta, offers a range of flexible spaces for meetings, conferences, exhibitions and banquets. It's one of the most well-equipped venues in the region, with the latest audiovisual technology, high-speed internet access and world-class service. But there's plenty of other venues across the country, whether you're looking to host smaller meetings or large-scale events.

Luxury stays

When it comes to accommodation, Malta delivers with a wide range of luxurious options. From the grand, historic five-star properties to ultra-modern boutique hotels, visitors are guaranteed comfort, elegance, and top-tier service. Major international hotel brands are complemented by locally-owned gems that capture the essence of Maltese hospitality. These hotels offer exceptional conference facilities, luxury spas, and gourmet dining, ensuring that both business and leisure guests experience the best of what Malta has to offer.

Delivering inspiration

Incentive travel remains one of the best ways to motivate employees and clients, and Malta

is uniquely suited to host these kinds of programmes, with a wealth of memorable team-building opportunities to delight and reward. Whether it's a private yacht charter, a guided tour of ancient temples, or a thrilling day of watersports, the range of options guarantee that every participant will leave feeling truly valued.

Culinary paradise

Malta's rich culinary scene blends Mediterranean and European influences. With 40 restaurants currently listed in the prestigious Michelin Guide, the island is a hub for gastronomes. Renowned chefs create unforgettable dining experiences with fresh local produce, much of which is sourced directly from Malta's farms. The Mediterranean diet, famous for its health benefits, is at the heart of the island's food culture, with fresh seafood, vegetables, olive oil, and local cheeses taking centre stage. Whether dining in a Michelin-starred restaurant or at a family-run eatery, Malta's diverse food offerings will delight even the most discerning palate.

Convenient transport links

Travelling to Malta has never been easier, with new air links opening all the time. In October, Aer Lingus launched a new three-times weekly direct flight from Dublin, while Ryanair has announced a new twice-weekly service from Glasgow starting in April. The short journey times across the island also mean your guests can seamlessly move from one location to another, making Malta an excellent option for multi-destination itineraries.

Wellness and nature

Wellness tourism has seen tremendous growth, and Malta is embracing this trend with plenty of opportunities to focus on mental and physical wellbeing, from yoga sessions on the beach to peaceful retreats in the scenic hills of Gozo. Horse riding, hiking, and cycling in Malta's pristine landscapes allow visitors to reconnect with nature and escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Many resorts also offer tailored wellness packages that include spa treatments, meditation, and fitness classes, helping guests rejuvenate both body and mind.

Eco-friendly approach

Sustainability is at the heart of Malta's approach to tourism, particularly in restaurants, with an increasing emphasis on locally sourced, fresh ingredients. The island's commitment to sustainability is also reflected in its preservation of natural spaces and cultural heritage. By supporting local farmers, artisans, and sustainable practices, Malta ensures your event has a minimal environmental footprint while providing guests with the best the island has to offer.

What are you waiting for?

Whether you're organising a high-profile conference, a rewarding incentive trip, or seeking a restorative wellness retreat, Malta offers everything you need to make your event extraordinary. With luxurious accommodations, cutting-edge venues, Michelin-starred dining, year-round sunshine, and a rich cultural backdrop, Malta is the ideal destination for any occasion.
www.visitmalta.com/en/vmim

HISTORIC HIGHLIGHTS
Gorgeous views over the beautiful cityscape of Valletta from Marsamxett Harbour

> "Imagine hosting an elegant cocktail reception overlooking the azure waters of the Mediterranean"

COMPETITION TIME

VisitMalta is offering two prizes to *Business Traveller* readers this month

WIN TWO RETURN FLIGHTS TO MALTA

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Head online to register before 31 January, 2025.

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For full terms and conditions and to enter, visit businesstraveller.com/competitions

IMAGES VISITMALTA

WORDS
LAUREL IVES

The rise of the wellness social club

This New York members' club prioritises health over hedonism, combining spaces for social connection with the latest treatments

AS THE NUMBER of people drinking alcohol continues to decline, a health-conscious generation is looking for a new setting for socialising.

Enter Remedy Place, the 'social wellness club' where members mingle over bone broth, IV drips and cold plunges.

With sites already operating in LA and New York, Remedy has just opened its largest club to date in New York's SoHo. Boston is next, and the company is planning new clubs annually.

"It's a luxury club destination where guests can socialise and connect while prioritising their wellbeing," explains Jonathan Leary, founder and CEO of Remedy Place.

Group experiences include a 'contrast suite', which has a traditional sauna and ice bath complete with a mini bar serving healthy drinks and snacks, and a sunken, communal living room for blissed-out chats.

In SoHo, new treatments include AI-powered bodywork, a deep tissue massage, a customisable infrared sauna suite and an IV library where guests can work or read while getting their fill of vitamins. Non-members can also book traditional treatments, such as acupuncture and massages.

SELF-CARE Meet and mingle beside a cosy fire or in a detoxifying sauna at the new social wellness hub

IMAGES **PAUL JORDAN, BLACKPOINT DESIGN LIMITED; COURTESY OF ZEM WELLNESS ALTEA**

THAT'S WYLD
Liverpool gets a taste of a Finnish floating sauna

The UK's first floating sauna makes a splash

Liverpool welcomes Nordic traditions with a modern sauna experience at Princes Dock

BRITAIN'S BOOMING sauna scene is showing no signs of slowing down and it now has its first floating variation. The elegant Finnish-style Wyld Sauna opened at the end of November in Liverpool's Princes Dock, capable of holding up to 30 people, with four ice baths alongside. Sauna-goers can also plunge into the chilly waters of the dock, which have an 'excellent' water quality rating and are tested fortnightly. "Our mission is to bring the best of the Nordic sauna tradition to Liverpool and the UK, where anyone can come, unwind and reconnect – and this location gives us the perfect blend of city energy and natural calm," said Jon Miller, co-founder of Wyld Sauna.

For those keen on visiting the ancestral home of the sauna, head to Helsinki to enjoy the recently opened Uusi Sauna – complete with saunas, steam rooms and a large bar and bistro next door to cool off.

◆

Did you know?

The number of saunas is doubling on an annual basis in Britain

Hotel healing

THE ZEM WELLNESS CLINIC ALTEA, opening in January in the Spanish city of Alicante, aims to boost wellbeing through its programmes based on high-end medical principles. Its setting is relaxing and luxurious, offering sea views, fruit and vegetables sourced from a local organic farm, an extensive spa, pools and ample surrounding nature. When it comes to treatments, consider the 'Pro-Ageing' programme which includes medical tests, consultations, treatments and holistic therapies to "embrace the passage of time". You can also add on 'boosts' – mini treatments targeting a range of health concerns, from sexual wellbeing to sleep and hair loss. The region itself is becoming a destination for hotel healing, with the clinic's CEO Franck De Weerdt hailing from the renowned SHA Wellness just 25 minutes away.

WORDS
HANNAH BRANDLER

LITTLE LUXURIES

Fancy a splurge? Treat yourself to luxury suites and once-in-a-lifetime experiences with this month's pick of lavish indulgences

WINTER SUN

Set sail for the Seychelles

CHEVAL BLANC is opening its sixth 'Maison' in December, located on Mahé Island in the Seychelles. The Jean-Michel Gathy designed resort boasts 52 villas with Indian Ocean vistas and private pools, while restaurants cover cuisines from Seychellois-Creole to Italian, Mediterranean, Japanese and French.
A Guerlain spa tends to your wellness needs, while children are entertained at the vast 1,500 sqm Le Carrousel club.

FILM FANTASY

THE EXPERIENCE

Memoirs in motion

TRAVELLERS CAN NOW STAR in films chronicling their luxury trips. Virtuoso and Globetrender's 'Luxury Travel Trend Watch: 2025' revealed that travellers are hiring film crews to transform real-life experiences into cinematic stories. Companies including Pelorus, Cookson Adventures, Quintessentially Travel and Joro Experiences offer packages from £13,000 to £350,000 for such retrospectives.

FOR ART LOVERS

Renaissance-themed reward

Rocco Forte Hotels has launched a series of exclusive experiences for art enthusiasts. Guests of Rocco Forte House Milan can gain access to Biblioteca Ambrosiana, home to ample Da Vinci drawings and writings, for a tour with the library's director – followed by a private dinner in the library itself.

IMAGES CLIVE NICHOLS; JAKOB OWENS/UNSPLASH; CHEVAL BLANC

COME FIND Your VIRGINIA

The 1804 Inn & Cottages at Barboursville Vineyards

Barboursville, VA

Located on the grounds of the award-winning Barboursville Vineyards, The 1804 Inn & Cottages is comprised of select historic houses on a unique wine estate, preserving the intangible space for reflection that cannot be attempted by a conventional properties. A classic Georgian villa, The 1804 Inn predates, by a generation, the construction of Governor Barbour's mansion which it overlooks, and its three suites are expansive and luxurious in the most timeless way. The three cottages, within strolling proximity to the historic landmark Ruins, the Tasting Room, and Palladio Restaurant, evoke the estate's plantation history and offer exclusivity, comfort, and seclusion for the utmost in off-the-beaten path luxury.

bbvwine.com/our-inn

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WATCH

Tsunami: Race Against Time

National Geographic's four-part docuseries is streaming on Disney+ to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The series follows the wave as it spreads, through newly discovered archive footage and testimonies from survivors, scientists and rescuers who witnessed the tragic event.

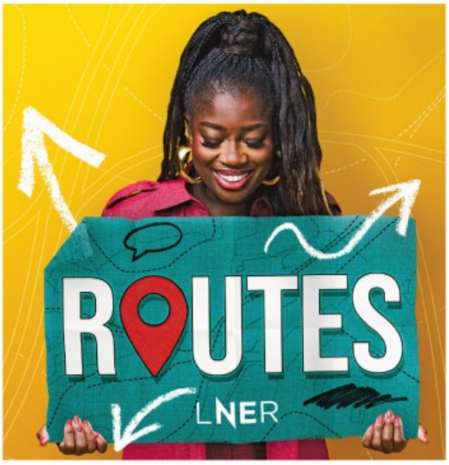
READ

Freedom: Memories 1954 – 2021 by Angela Merkel

IN ANGELA MERKEL'S new memoir, co-written with her long-time political advisor Beate Baumann, she looks back on her 31-year political career and personal life. Stories meander through her childhood, youth, studies in the German Democratic Republic, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Also included are retellings of conversations with some of the world's most powerful people, discussions of international turning points and an inside look into how global decisions were made.

ANGELA MERKEL
FREEDOM

LISTEN



Routes with Clara Amfo

RADIO BROADCASTER CLARA AMFO has teamed up with LNER to launch a podcast about all things travel. Expect relatable discussions with well-known guests including singer-songwriter Tom Grennan, author Candice Brathwaite and DJ Arielle Free about memorable trips and life experiences.

CULTURAL CALENDAR

OUR PICK OF EVENTS TAKING PLACE AROUND THE WORLD

DOMESTIC

Somerset House at 25, London

Somerset House has a jam-packed year of exhibitions and events to mark its 25th anniversary in 2025. Choreographer Wayne McGregor's exhibition *Infinite Bodies* explores the relationships between performance and the body, while *SOIL: The World at Our Feet* (from 23 January) celebrates soil's role in human civilisation and its potential to heal the planet.

SHORT-HAUL

Brera Modern, Milan
from 8 December 2024

The Brera Modern is finally opening in December, fifty years after plans for the museum were first unveiled. Located down the road from the existing Pinacoteca di Brera, which houses works by the likes of Canova and Caravaggio, the new museum will showcase the gallery's modern oeuvres.

LONG-HAUL

Yayoi Kusama, Melbourne
15 December 2024 – 21 April 2025

The National Gallery of Victoria's new exhibition showcases nearly 200 works by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. Known for her distinctive use of polka dots and her arresting immersive installations, this exhibition includes the global premiere of a never-before-seen infinity mirror room.

IMAGES **THE ASSOICATED PRESS; SOMERSET HOUSE/ELSA PEARL/ COURTESY OF OTA FINE ARTS AND VICTORIA MIRO © YAYOI KUSAMA; TATE 2021**

Hacker-Pschorr
Himmel der Bayern
Boxe 17
Boxe 19

Magical moments

Unlock one-of-a-kind experiences with Marriott Bonvoy Moments

ROOM UPGRADES ARE LOVELY. A free night is a treat. But front-row seats at sold-out events – now that's memorable. Every time you stay or dine at a participating Marriott Bonvoy property, travel with a partner such as SIXT, or host an event, you can earn points for future stays or once-in-a-lifetime experiences through Marriott Bonvoy Moments.

Case study 1: Oktoberfest Weekend in Munich

The authentic Bavarian experience began with traditional embroidered dirndls and leather lederhosen delivered to our door at Le Méridien Munich. At Irmi, the hotel's modern German restaurant, a private drinks reception and spread of Bavarian food awaited the Marriott Bonvoy members who successfully bid on the VIP Oktoberfest experience.

Our host Julian was excellent, recommending German beers we should sample and the 'dos and don'ts' of Oktoberfest. Fully briefed and dressed for the occasion, our group was escorted to the Oktoberfest site to explore areas such as Oide Wiesn (Old Oktoberfest) with quaint wooden carousels and puppet shows.

Finally, it was time to enter the Marstall tent – one of the favourites, with a sweeping red roof and live upbeat music.

Thousands of visitors descend on these tents early in the morning to secure seats – so it was a relief to have our spaces reserved. Our table was in prime position too: in the centre of the tent, right below the stage. Swept along with the spirited crowds, we found ourselves wielding amber steins and dancing on the benches.

Hacker tent was the final stop of the night, with canopies of painted stars extending overhead and a brass band on a revolving stage. Loaded platters of roast pork, potato dumplings and Wiener Schnitzel arrived at our reserved table, along with yet more beer – the perfect end to experiencing Oktoberfest Marriott Bonvoy style.

Case study 2: NFL box tickets at Tottenham Hotspur

The 62,850-seater Tottenham Hotspur Stadium was packed out for the 2024 NFL London Games in October – but thanks to Marriott Bonvoy Moments, I had a ticket. American football fans sporting emerald green or purple jerseys streamed into the gleaming stadium to watch the showdown between the New York Jets and the Minnesota Vikings.

With our box passes ready, we headed up to Level 2 for the Sideline Suites where the Marriott Bonvoy box awaited us. We were welcomed with a glass of fizz and met the other members who had used their points to bid on one of the exclusive NFL Moments packages.

Our group was well taken care of, with a stocked bar manned by dedicated staff and a continuous stream of elevated game snacks. When the action started, we headed into our private seating area. Between the smiling cheerleaders, the mascots on the sidelines and the pitch action, I never knew quite where to look, but the atmosphere was electric. Points were scored, tackles were made, and the clock ticked down to zero. Vikings: 23. Jets: 17, exhilarating memories: 1.

> "Thousands of visitors descend on these tents - so it was a relief to have our spaces reserved"

Have your moment

New Moments across the world are constantly added to the website. These can be redeemed with Marriott Bonvoy points through auctions or fixed prize packages – with a few special Moments available for just one point!

Upcoming Moments include a private Maison Mumm Champagne experience with a stay at La Caserne Chanzy Hotel & Spa, Autograph Collection on 20-21 February 2025 (bid by 13 January). Alternatively, bid by 19 December to enjoy an evening with Nigella Lawson at St. Pancras Renaissance Hotel, London on 29 January.

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Expert opinions on the future of travel

THE BIG INTERVIEW

WITH DILLIP RAJAKARIER

CEO MINOR HOTELS

BIOGRAPHY

Dillip Rajakarier joined Minor Hotels in 2007 as chief finance and investment officer. At the time, the group had a portfolio of 12 hotels concentrated in Southeast Asia. Since taking the reins as CEO in 2011, he has driven the company's rapid global expansion, which today includes more than 550 properties in 60 countries.

'You need a degree to master the points game! We've made it simple. Instead of points, we offer Discovery Dollars. It's very transparent.'

Tamsin Cocks chats to the CEO of Minor Hotels about expansion plans, the rise of slow travel, IV drip bars and launching a hotel school

ILLUSTRATIONS PAUL RYDING

Q&A

Minor Hotels has been busy recently with a flurry of recent openings. Can you tell us about some of the latest developments?
In 2024 we opened some of the best Anantara hotels in the United Arab Emirates. The Santorini Abu Dhabi Retreat is very exclusive, with just 22 rooms and suites, and the Ras Al Khaimah resort is almost a Maldivian experience with overwater villas. The Anantara Palais Hansen Vienna Hotel in Austria was another great acquisition – a rebrand of an iconic hotel. In October, we launched Anantara Ubud Bali Resort, and we've got a lot more coming – including in Zanzibar, China and Zambia.

What about your growth plans going forward?
Our aim is to open another 200+ hotels in the next three years, which will add about 40,000 rooms. We have a strong pipeline, with about 80 hotels already in progress, so we are confident that we will meet the target. We are looking at adding at least another 50 hotels in India over the next ten years, and also expand our brands in China. We feel strong in southern Europe, but we want to expand into the Nordic countries. We've already launched NH Collection in Copenhagen and Helsinki, and there's huge potential there.

What about launching new brands, or is your portfolio now complete?
We only have eight brands. In the future, we might have one or two more soft brands – we are looking to maybe create a collection at the luxury level. So, if you have a unique hotel that's a luxury brand with a passionate owner – but it's not an Anantara – it can be part of that collection. What we don't want to do is have 40 different brands where no one can tell you the difference between brand number 25 and 35.

Continued from overleaf

How hard is it to launch brands in new markets? When we go into new countries we have to work twice as hard to promote the destination and the brand, which we've done in quite a few places that seemed like mission impossible.

A good example is Abu Dhabi's Sir Bani Yas Island. No one wanted it because it was far from Abu Dhabi and you have to take a boat crossing, but we took it and created a destination experience. On the back of that, we attained Qasr Al Sarab Resort. Now we've got a relationship with one of the sovereign wealth funds in Abu Dhabi who have invested with us in Thailand, the Maldives and Singapore.

What does Minor Hotels bring to the market? People in Europe and the US want that Asian hospitality, and I think that's something we bring. We also add our F&B expertise – it's one of our core businesses and we own a lot of our high-end and casual dining restaurants as well.

Can you tell us more about your medical wellness? I think, especially post-pandemic, there's been a huge demand for wellness. People want to feel good, be active, feel less than their age, and live life without being dependent on other people. Coming from an Asian background, we're used to pampering and spas, but now we have elevated that into medical health and wellness. We've launched a new dedicated facility at Anantara Layan Phuket Resort. It's a 1,700 sqm facility spread over two floors, adjacent to the main resort, so it can offer that integrated wellness offering. It has proper doctors and medical specialists, not just

'Slow travel is that moment to unplug, where you're not responsible for anything – you can just relax'

a spa, and it covers four pillars – traditional Thai medicine, advanced medical wellness, nutrition and physical wellness.

We also have an IV drip bar, which is a joint venture with Veritas out of Singapore, where we do jet lag, detox, weight loss, immunotherapy, and the best one is a hangover cure, which I've been told works really well – 45 minutes and you're ready to go again! These longevity hubs have been a big attraction for modern travellers.

What else is Minor Hotels getting up to?
We do trains, cruises, planes... Our luxury Vietage train in Vietnam offers a six-hour trip from Da Nang to Quy Nhon, and we've just launched a second phase from Nha Trang. We plan to expand this, particularly in Thailand where tourism is one of the GDP drivers. The government is really keen to promote places besides Phuket and Krabi, but these places don't have five-star hotels and it's difficult to sustain. If you do the five-star train experience, people can visit and keep moving to new locations, so it helps promote those Tier 2 and Tier 3 destinations.

In Bangkok, we also do fantastic overnight cruises with spa beds and your own crew. These are the kind of experiences that people love right now. It's slow travel. It's that moment to unplug, where you're not responsible for anything – you can just relax.

Do you have plans to grow your midscale offering?
We don't have many brands in that sector, but we're focusing on bringing the midscale to secondary locations. It's a totally different business model. It's more about transformation from a digital perspective, so automated check-in and keyless rooms.

How do you reward your frequent guests?
Our DISCOVERY loyalty programme is part of Global Hotel Alliance. Unlike big hotel chains, where their loyalty programme is only for their brands, ours is more like a Star Alliance model, where we have four founding members with over 1,000 hotels and now about 26 million loyalty members.

Instead of points, we offer Discovery Dollars. From a guest perspective, it's very transparent. If you stay with us and earn 50 dollars, you could then go to a Kempinski and spend 50 dollars. You don't have to think about converting points, based on high or low period, and all those things. It's too complex – you need a degree to master the points game! We've made it simple and the loyalty programme works really well.

What's the greatest challenge you're facing?
We can navigate through inflation, interest rates, pandemics, we've done it all, many times. The biggest challenge for us is people – getting the talent we need. Especially when we are expanding so much, you need to build that culture and the mindset.

During Covid we launched our own hotel school in Thailand in association with Les Roches in Switzerland. It's the first of its kind as it's actually located within a hotel. We offer a three-year programme and each intake is about 160 students from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, India, Europe and the Middle East. We had our first crop of graduates last year and they're now working all over, some with us, and some at other luxury hotels. **BT**

LATEST OPENINGS

AVANI MUSEUM QUARTER AMSTERDAM HOTEL OPENED IN MAY

TIVOLI LA CALETA TENERIFE RESORT OPENED IN FEBRUARY

LAYAN LIFE BY ANANTARA OPENED IN OCTOBER

NH BANGKOK SUKHUMVIT BOULEVARD OPENED IN OCTOBER

NH MALDIVES KUDA RAH RESORT OPENED IN SEPTEMBER

LOYALTY LESSONS

SUPERMARKET *SWEEP*

Shop smart with the right supermarket and credit card combination to boost your points balance

NAVIGATING the world of points can be confusing. In the US, credit cards and reward programmes mean people can collect miles much faster than those living in the UK. Here, every point really does count.

With BA economy reward flights starting from circa 5,000 points, it can feel like forever before you've collected enough – knowing the shortcuts is vital.

This month, we're putting the weekly shop under the spotlight to showcase how you can quickly rack up extra points, without any extra effort.

The weekly shop

The average couple spends £106.89 on their weekly groceries* at supermarkets. Here's how you can make that shop work for you.

Which frequent flyer programme?

For oneworld, British Airways Avios can be collected through Sainsbury's by connecting your Nectar and Avios accounts.

For Skyteam, we recommend collecting points for Virgin Atlantic's Flying Club via the airline's partnership with Tesco.

Sadly, Star Alliance doesn't have any partnerships with retailers in the UK, but there are still opportunities to earn miles through online shopping portals.

*based on data from the Food Foundation, October 2024

British Airways Avios

By shopping at Sainsbury's, the weekly shop would automatically give you 66 Avios, thanks to the conversion rate of 400 Nectar points to 250 Avios. However, by shopping smart with Nectar bonuses, such as dynamic offers in store, you can regularly achieve an additional 250-400 Nectar points each week.

If you use a British Airways American Express Platinum Card you could also get an additional 1.5 Avios per pound spent, which would boost your weekly earning potential by 159 Avios.

Our top tip would be to use the Nectar Amex card, which provides 3x Nectar points at Sainsbury's. This translates to an additional 318 Nectar points, giving you 198 Avios.

WEEKLY SHOP
66 Avios

BONUS DEALS
204 Avios

SAINSBURY'S AMERICAN EXPRESS CREDIT CARD
198 Avios

ANNUAL POTENTIAL AVIOS
24,336 Avios

Virgin Atlantic Flying Club

By comparison, the same shop at Tesco would give you 213 Virgin Red points, thanks to the conversion rate of 250 Clubcard points to 500 Virgin Red points. Unlike Nectar, Tesco doesn't really offer any bonus points to boost your balance. The Tesco Clubcard Credit Card will give you 5 points per £4 spent, but our recommendation is the American Express Platinum card, which gives one point per pound, but has so many added travel advantages.

WEEKLY SHOP
213 Points

AMERICAN EXPRESS PLATINUM CREDIT CARD
106 Points

ANNUAL POTENTIAL POINTS
16,588 Points

*calculations accurate at time of writing, November 2024

> Auto conversion and sign-up bonuses sometimes apply for both retailer partnerships, so check to see if there any offers at the time of registering.

WORDS
JONNY CLARK
MARK CASWELL,
HANNAH BRANDLER

Level up

Virgin, BA and countless other airlines offer online shopping portals. By logging into the portal and clicking the link through to the retailer, it's possible to make huge multiples of points per pound spent, which are retroactively applied to your account a few weeks later.

IMAGE **GETTY**

SWEET REDEMPTION Fly further with Virgin Atlantic's Flying Club revamp

Virgin Atlantic's Flying Club revamp comes into effect

VIRGIN ATLANTIC Flying Club members can now redeem points for 'any seat on the plane on any date'.

The frequent flyer programme has also moved to dynamic pricing, where redemption rates will vary in line with demand, much like normal ticket prices.

A new Reward Saver product has also been introduced, offering redemptions as low as 6,000 points each way. These will be highlighted with a red label on the carrier's website, but availability will vary.

Virgin has listed the maximum points that will be needed for one-way Saver reward flights, though stated many will be available for less.

ROUTE TO/FROM UK	ECONOMY CLASSIC	PREMIUM	UPPER CLASS
Israel	9,000 / 11,000	16,000 / 20,000	28,000 / 33,000
India, Dubai & Saudi Arabia	10,000 / 20,000	17,500 / 27,500	37,500 / 47,500
US – Northeast	10,000 / 20,000	17,500 / 27,500	47,500 / 57,500
Caribbean	10,000 / 20,000	17,500 / 27,500	57,500 / 67,500
US – Midwest & South	12,500 / 22,500	22,500 / 32,500	47,500 / 67,500
Nigeria & Ghana	12,500 / 22,500	22,500 / 32,500	57,500 / 67,500
South Africa and Indian Ocean	2,500 / 22,500	25,000 / 42,500	57,500 / 67,500
US – West	15,000 / 25,000	27,500 / 37,500	67,500 / 77,500

The number of Virgin Points earned on Premium and Upper Class tickets is also increasing by 75% and 50% respectively.

Nectar and Marriott Bonvoy announce conversion partnership

Nectar and Marriott Bonvoy unveil a new loyalty partnership launching soon

SPECIFIC DETAILS have yet to be confirmed, but it will mean Nectar members will be able to earn points if they link their Marriott Bonvoy account and book at participating properties. Members will also be able to convert points in either direction between their Nectar and Marriott Bonvoy accounts.

When Nectar launched a similar partnership with the British Airways Executive Club in 2021, members were able to convert 250 Avios into 400 Nectar points, or vice versa. This benefit has subsequently been eroded, as it now requires 400 Avios to convert into 400 Nectar points, while the conversion in the opposite direction is still 400 Nectar points for 250 Avios.

The question is how will Nectar and Marriott Bonvoy position their points conversion benefit? It seems unlikely that the conversion will be possible in both directions without some sort of points penalty – but we'll find out when full details are announced.

RICHARD TAMS
AIRLINE CONSULTANT AND EXECUTIVE COACH

LAST ORDERS

Should we limit alcohol sales to prevent passengers behaving badly? Our columnist hopes not...

We all know the knock-on effects of a lengthy flight delay. The missed onward connection, the abandoned business meeting, or simply lost time with the family after an arduous business trip. But what about the effects on passengers' alcohol consumption and the resulting outbreaks of violence onboard?

According to Ryanair CEO, Michael O'Leary, "The biggest problem we have is when you have a day of bad delays. People are waiting around at airports and they keep lorrying alcohol into themselves."

Of course, many of us enjoy a drink or two at airports without incident, but cases of unruly passenger behaviour are on the rise. IATA's latest analysis reveals there was one incident for every 480 flights in 2023, versus one for every 568 flights in 2022 and one per 835 flights in 2021.

Over the limit

But what can we do about it? The UK Civil Aviation Authority already states that 'acts of drunkenness' on an aircraft face a maximum fine of £5,000 and two years in prison, but it doesn't appear to deter those who overindulge with pre-flight jitters.

O'Leary also cited the difficulty in identifying intoxicated passengers as a major obstacle. "It's not that easy for airlines to identify people who are inebriated at the gate, particularly if they are boarding with two or three others... As long as they can stand up and shuffle, they will get through. Then when the plane takes off, we see the misbehaviour." O'Leary's solution has been to call for a two-drink limit to be imposed in airport bars.

Opponents of the nanny state will be choking on their inflight gin and tonics at the thought of such an imposition, however a new YouGov poll suggests that most of the British public would support restrictions on the consumption of alcohol at airports. Of the 6,771 British adults surveyed, 62 per cent said that they strongly or tend to support a two-drink limit at airport bars. Only 9 per cent strongly opposed the idea.

'Unruly passenger behaviour is on the rise'

As business travellers, we have a fair bit of skin in the game here, both as those who enjoy a preflight drink and won't appreciate a rowdy flight.

Closing time

However, placing restrictions on the consumption of alcohol is far easier said than done. The mechanisms to monitor sales across an entire airport is unclear. Proponents suggest that tracking the number of drinks bought via a passenger's boarding pass might be the answer. However, the technology required at point-of-sale would be punitive to alcohol retailers, especially when there's nothing in it for them, except a dramatically reduced turnover. In the face of such a requirement, many would make a hasty departure, leaving airports to find tenants for the abandoned bars.

Not to mention, if someone has reached their permitted limit, there's nothing to stop their tee-total aunt stepping up to the plate and buying them a shot of tequila. Also, what's to stop travellers arriving at the airport already half-cut?

So far, we have assumed that these drinks will be purchased. Would these restrictions also apply in airport lounges, where booze is dispensed lavishly for free? Airlines might rejoice at the cost-saving, but status-wielding frequent flyers would be up in arms. I have been known to arrive at the BA lounge hours early to enjoy a few glasses of fizz ahead of a flight to Malaga. Is this all to end?

The answer, I suppose, lies in the good old-fashioned self-control of passengers to know when to stop, and the discipline of airlines to prevent the insubordinate from boarding. Failing that, install breathalysers at the gate. **BT**

CHEERS TO THAT
A survey reveals the British public would support restrictions on airport drinking

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ART INNOVATOR

Hannah Brandler chats to Takashi Kudo, a member of teamLab – the international art collective from Japan

IMAGE TEAMLAB, FLOATING FLOWER GARDEN: FLOWERS AND I ARE OF THE SAME ROOT, THE GARDEN AND I ARE ONE © TEAMLAB

Tell us about teamLab.
teamLab is an international art collective founded in 2001. It's made up of specialists with different skillsets, including painters, CG animators, software and hardware engineers, mathematicians and architects. Founder Toshiyuki Inoko's background is in physics and robotics, while mine is in literature and philosophy. I joined in 2010 and previously worked as editor-in-chief for a video game magazine in Stockholm. I don't have a title as such at teamLab. We're a collective so we don't care about titles or independent names – we're a team!

What's teamLab's mission?
At teamLab, we try to form relationships between humans and the world through artworks.

It's comparable to travel. When people travel, they experience the world. For instance, you might be able to see Mount Fuji in guidebooks, magazines, the internet or on TV, but if you really want to understand such a place then you need to travel there.

At teamLab, we try to bring people inside different worlds and provide an experience that can't be explained through words.

How has teamLab evolved?
When we started, we were a group of like-minded outsiders with dreams to create artworks using various new technologies as tools. Now countries around the world treat us as artists.

Where has teamLab exhibited and how do you choose destinations?
Our philosophy is to say yes to all destinations and opportunities. We want to work with like-minded people who understand our art. Projects, however, can take five to six years, so we can't work to tight, demanding schedules. We first debuted outside of Japan in 2011, with an exhibition at Kaikai Kiki Gallery in Taipei. Since then, we've gone all over the world – from New York to London, Paris, Singapore, Beijing and Melbourne.

The exhibitions are incredibly interactive. Can you give us some examples of how guests interact with the artworks?
We've tried to recreate experiences of nature inside our museums. teamLab's works are immersive, so include wind, aromas and sounds. We're not gods so we can't create natural wonders like a forest or rainbow but we can use architecture and technology to create a similar experience. It's akin to how Impressionist artists used paint to depict nature.

In the *Floating Flower Garden* at teamLab Planets TOKYO, the space is filled with orchids that float above people as they wander through.

New exhibits
coming to Hamburg, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Utrecht and Kyoto in 2025

2,504,264 people
visited teamLab Planets TOKYO between April 2023 and March 2024, setting a Guinness World Record for the world's most visited museum for a single art group

What project are you most proud of?
The creation of our permanent museums, teamLab Borderless: MORI Building DIGITAL ART MUSEUM and teamLab Planets TOKYO, were a turning point. It was also amazing to see sold-out tickets for our exhibitions in San Francisco's Palo Alto in 2019, and in London in 2017.

What's next for teamLab?
A new exhibition called teamLab Phenomena Abu Dhabi in the emirate's Saadiyat Cultural District. We've been working on the 17,000 sqm building for almost six years. We would like to create large-scale exhibitions and want to share the experience with as many people as possible. We'd love to do something in the UK and the US.

Where have you travelled recently?
Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi, New York and Austin.

What's your dream destination?
South America and South Africa. I also really like the UK, especially the beautiful countryside. **BT**

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2024 BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

TRAILBLAZERS IN TRAVEL

Discover the winners of the 2024 *Business Traveller* Awards

EACH YEAR we invite our roving readers to cast their votes in the *Business Traveller* awards to determine who has delivered the best travel experiences.

Counted and verified by an independent research company, the results offer a true reflection of customer opinion, making them an important industry benchmark for almost 40 years (turn to page 82 for highlights over the years!).

On 7 November, the results were announced at The Steel Yard in the City of London. More than 200 industry guests attended, enjoying a speech from TV presenter Ben Thompson, delicious mains of coq au vin or squash tarte tatin, a rousing performance from the No Limit Street Band, plus plenty of networking over bubbles. Highlights included Singapore Airlines walking away with five top awards, while Malmaison took home the award for Best Business Hotel Brand in the UK.

Congratulations to all of the winners, thank you to our readers for voting, and thank you to our event sponsors: Priority Pass, Delta, Plaza Premium Group, FREENOW, Timothy London, Vertus Edit and reachtv. Read on to find out who won what!

HOTEL HIGHLIGHT Malmaison was named Best Business Hotel Brand in the UK

CATEGORY

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BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND WORLDWIDE
1. InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
2. Hilton Hotels & Resorts
3. Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts
4. Marriott Hotels
5. Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN THE UK
1. Malmaison
2. Premier Inn
3. Hilton Hotels & Resorts
4. Hotel du Vin

BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN EUROPE
1. Hilton Hotels & Resorts
2. InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
3. Radisson Blu
4. NH Hotels & Resorts

BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN NORTH AMERICA
1. JW Marriott
2. Hilton Hotels & Resorts
3. Marriott Hotels
4. InterContinental Hotels & Resorts

BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN THE MIDDLE EAST
1. Rotana Hotels & Resorts
2. Jumeirah
3. Kempinski Hotels
4. InterContinental Hotels & Resorts

BEST BUSINESS HOTEL BRAND IN ASIA PACIFIC
1. Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts
2. Mandarin Oriental
3. Pan Pacific Hotels and Resorts
4. The Peninsula Hotels

BEST BUDGET HOTEL BRAND
1. Premier Inn
2. Holiday Inn Express
3. ibis
4. Holiday Inn

BEST LUXURY HOTEL BRAND
1. Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts
2. InterContinental Hotels & Resorts
3. Mandarin Oriental
4. Conrad Hotels & Resorts

BEST HOTEL LOYALTY SCHEME
1. Hilton Honors
2. Marriott Bonvoy
3. IHG One Rewards
4. ALL - Accor Live Limitless

BEST SERVICED APARTMENT BRAND
1. Ascott
2. Fraser Suites
3. Staycity
4. Marriott Executive Apartments

BEST INDEPENDENT HOTEL BRAND
1. Small Luxury Hotels of the World
2. The Langham Hotels & Resorts
3. citizenM
4. The Doyle Collection

BEST AIRPORT HOTEL
1. Sofitel London Heathrow
2. Crowne Plaza Changi Airport, Singapore
3. Hilton Munich Airport
4. Hilton London Heathrow Airport Hotel

2024
BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS

ASIA FOCUS Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts is awarded Best Business Hotel in Asia Pacific

IMAGES TIM WINTER; JURAS DUO PHOTOGRAPHY; CAMERON KERNAHAN

FLYING HIGH Qatar Airways took home four awards, including Best Business Class

CATEGORY

BEST AIRLINES

Your favourite carriers for business and pleasure

BEST AIRLINE

1. Singapore Airlines
2. Qatar Airways
3. British Airways
4. Emirates
5. Virgin Atlantic

BEST SHORT-HAUL CARRIER

1. British Airways
2. Aegean
3. Lufthansa
4. KLM/Turkish Airlines

BEST LONG-HAUL AIRLINE

1. Qatar Airways
2. Singapore Airlines
3. Emirates
4. Japan Airlines

BEST FREQUENT FLYER PROGRAMME

1. British Airways Executive Club
2. Lufthansa Miles & More
3. Air France/KLM Flying Blue
4. Emirates Skywards

BEST FIRST CLASS

1. Singapore Airlines
2. Emirates
3. British Airways
4. Air France

BEST BUSINESS CLASS

1. Qatar Airways
2. Singapore Airlines
3. Emirates
4. Cathay Pacific
5. Virgin Atlantic

BEST PREMIUM ECONOMY CLASS

1. Virgin Atlantic
2. Emirates
3. British Airways
4. Singapore Airlines

BEST ECONOMY CLASS

1. Singapore Airlines
2. Emirates
3. Qatar Airways
4. Virgin Atlantic

BEST NORTH AMERICAN AIRLINE

1. Delta Air Lines
2. United Airlines
3. American Airlines
4. JetBlue

BEST CABIN STAFF

1. Singapore Airlines
2. Virgin Atlantic
3. Qatar Airways
4. All Nippon Airways

SUCCESS FOR SINGAPORE Singapore Airlines was the biggest winner, taking home five awards

IMAGES **COURTESY OF QATAR AIRWAYS; NEWSCAST**

2024
BUSINESS
TRAVELLER
AWARDS

AVIATION WINNERS Delta Air Lines takes home Best North American airline (top); oneworld was named the Best Airline Alliance (right)

BEST AIRLINE ALLIANCE

1. oneworld
2. Star Alliance
3. SkyTeam

BEST LOW-COST CARRIER

1. easyJet
2. AirAsia
3. IndiGo
4. Wizz Air

BEST ASIAN AIRLINE

1. Singapore Airlines
2. Cathay Pacific
3. Japan Airlines
4. Korean Air

BEST MIDDLE EASTERN AIRLINE

1. Qatar Airways
2. Emirates
3. Etihad Airways
4. Saudia

BEST AFRICAN AIRLINE

1. Ethiopian Airlines
2. Royal Air Maroc
3. Kenya Airways
4. South African Airways

BEST INDEPENDENT LOUNGE

1. American Express Centurion Lounge, London Heathrow T3
2. VIENNA Lounge, Vienna Airport T1
3. No1 Lounge, London Heathrow T3
4. Plaza Premium Lounge, London Heathrow T2

BEST AIRPORT LOUNGE

1. British Airways Concorde Room, London Heathrow T5
2. Virgin Atlantic Clubhouse, London Heathrow T3
3. Cathay Pacific The Pier First Class Lounge, Hong Kong International Airport
4. Cathay Pacific First Class Lounge, London Heathrow T3

BEST INFLIGHT FOOD & BEVERAGE

1. Qatar Airways
2. Singapore Airlines
3. Emirates
4. Virgin Atlantic

BEST INFLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

1. Emirates
2. Qatar Airways
3. Virgin Atlantic
4. Cathay Pacific

LOUNGE BREAK British Airways Concorde Room at Heathrow T5 was voted as the Best Airport Lounge

> *THERE WERE 49 CATEGORIES IN THIS YEAR'S AWARDS*

→

CALM SPACE Singapore Changi comes out on top

CATEGORY

BEST AIRPORTS

Hubs around the world continue to up their game with upgraded dining, leisure and entertainment facilities

BEST AIRPORT IN THE WORLD

1. Singapore Changi Airport
2. Heathrow Airport, London
3. Hamad International Airport, Doha
4. Dubai International Airport
5. Hong Kong International Airport

BEST AIRPORT FOR SHOPPING

1. Heathrow Airport, London
2. Singapore Changi Airport
3. Dubai International Airport
4. Hamad International Airport, Doha

BEST AIRPORT IN EUROPE

1. Heathrow Airport, London
2. Amsterdam Airport Schiphol
3. Zurich Airport
4. Munich Airport

BEST AIRPORT IN NORTH AMERICA

1. JFK International Airport, New York
2. Los Angeles International Airport
3. Chicago O'Hare International Airport
4. Dallas Fort Worth International Airport

BEST AIRPORT IN ASIA-PACIFIC

1. Singapore Changi Airport
2. Hong Kong International Airport
3. Tokyo Haneda Airport
4. Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok

BEST AIRPORT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

1. Hamad International Airport, Doha
2. Dubai International Airport
3. Abu Dhabi International Airport
4. Muscat International Airport

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BUSINESS TRAVELLER
TIMOTHY
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PRIORITY PASS
FREENOW FOR BUSINESS

OUTSTANDING GATEWAYS Doha's Hamad International Airport won Best Airport in the Middle East

IMAGES LI KIM GOH/GETTY

Best **Budget Hotel Brand** 2024

We wanted to thank everyone for nominating us as the Best Budget Hotel Brand at the Business Traveller Awards 2024, an award that we are very proud to have won. This is fantastic recognition for the work that our team does to ensure you can rest easy when travelling for business.

2024
BUSINESS TRAVELLER
AWARDS
WINNER
BEST BUDGET BRAND HOTEL
PREMIER INN

Premier Inn
Rest easy

CATEGORY

BEST GROUND TRANSPORTATION AND MICE

From chauffeur services to ride-hailing apps

BEST MICE DESTINATION IN EUROPE
1. London
2. Barcelona
3. Amsterdam
4. Berlin

BEST MICE DESTINATION WORLDWIDE
1. Singapore
2. Dubai
3. Las Vegas
4. New York

BEST CAR RENTAL COMPANY WORLDWIDE
1. Avis
2. Hertz
3. Sixt
4. Enterprise

BEST CAR RENTAL COMPANY IN EUROPE
1. Avis
2. Hertz
3. Sixt
4. Europcar

BEST UK DOMESTIC TRAIN SERVICE
1. Great Western Railway
2. LNER
3. Avanti West Coast
4. Elizabeth Line

BEST RIDE-HAILING SERVICE
1. Uber
2. Grab
3. Lyft
4. FREENOW

BEST CHAUFFEUR DRIVE
1. Blacklane
2. Addison Lee
3. Wheely
4. Sixt

MEET IN SINGAPORE Singapore was the top choice for business events

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TIMOTHY LONDON
VERTUS EDIT

CATEGORY

BEST LIFESTYLE

Your favourite luxury brands for luggage, credit cards and cruises

BEST LUGGAGE BRAND
1. Rimowa
2. Tumi
3. Samsonite
4. Briggs & Riley

BEST CREDIT/PAYMENT CARD FOR TRAVEL
1. BA American Express Premium Plus
2. The Platinum Card by American Express
3. Revolut
4. Halifax Clarity

BEST TRAVEL APP
1. Skyscanner
2. British Airways
3. Expedia
4. TripIt

BEST RIVER OR SPECIALIST CRUISE LINE
1. Hurtigruten
2. Viking Cruises
3. Emerald Cruises
4. Scenic Luxury Cruises & Tours

BEST OCEAN CRUISE LINE
1. Cunard
2. Silversea
3. Royal Caribbean International
4. Celebrity Cruises

IMAGES SHAN SHIHAN 2017/GETTY; ESPEN MILLS

2024 BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS
WINNER
BEST CAR RENTAL COMPANY IN EUROPE
AVIS
2024 BUSINESS TRAVELLER AWARDS
WINNER
BEST CAR RENTAL COMPANY WORLDWIDE
AVIS

AVIS®

THANK YOU FOR VOTING US SIMPLY THE BEST

Big thanks to everyone who helped us win Best Car Rental Company in the Worldwide and Europe categories at the Business Traveller Awards.

We're honoured to have been recognised for these prestigious awards, and rest assured our teams around the world are already working hard to win your support for next year.

WELCOME TO BETTER CAR HIRE

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From a crawl to a sprint – how Starlink is revolutionising inflight connectivity

WORLD of Wifi

From a crawl to a sprint: how Starlink is revolutionising inflight wifi

WORDS **CHRIS CHAMBERLIN**
ILLUSTRATIONS **NATHALIE LEES**

The benefits of inflight wifi are obvious: work can be relayed, clients can be serviced, colleagues are within reach. Daytime flights on connected aircraft are essentially remote work days and it just makes business travel easier. Even if you're not working, improved connectivity means access to live sports and the ability to stay in touch with friends and family. Priceless, especially for those always on the go.

Before reliable wifi, I'd spend an hour preparing my laptop with offline work – for every single flight. I'd land, venture to the hotel, and sync my inbox to respond to the day's messages before settling in.

Now we've reached the stage where wifi is becoming ubiquitous – it's anticipated, especially in a business cabin. Soon, it'll become the norm for every passenger to be online if they wish – and still be getting speeds that they'd celebrate on the ground. That's largely thanks to Starlink – a satellite network owned by Elon Musk's SpaceX, which is facilitating the fastest inflight connection speeds ever seen.

With Starlink (which has inked deals with the likes of United Airlines, Qatar Airways, Air France, Air New Zealand and Hawaiian Airlines) bandwidth-intensive tasks like video streaming are effortless, and video calling is a breeze. File downloads and cloud back-ups move from the crawling speeds of yesteryear to a sprint with a podium finish.

Browsing history

Of course, none of this has happened overnight. Back in 2001, Boeing spearheaded the first commercial inflight broadband service. Known as Connexion, it launched in 2004 with Lufthansa as the debut customer. Other carriers quickly followed, with Singapore Airlines, Etihad and Korean Air keen to get online, to name a few. Impressively, this all took place before the iPhone was even invented in 2007.

I still recall the early days of excitedly noticing the inflight hotspot. Connecting back then was such a treat; an unexpected aid to my efficiency – though glacial speeds were still the norm.

It would take until 2013 for something better. That's when JetBlue signed a deal with ViaSat. The year prior, ViaSat put a new satellite into service: ViaSat-1, capable of a 25Mbps link to the aircraft. Compared to 2004-era technology, this increased speeds more than tenfold, allowing more passengers to surf simultaneously and providing the smoother service you get today.

Starlink's services meanwhile exceed 200Mbps – offering a faster connection than I have at my own house.

Better than legroom

In a 2023 ViaSat survey of 11,000 flyers, 80% said that inflight wifi was important at the booking stage, while almost a third would pay more for their airfare if it included free wifi on the journey. After overall price, wifi ranked higher than anything else for those surveyed.

Some airlines debate between offering free or paid wifi. For others, it's a question whether to even offer it at all – but traveller trends are changing that.

"I don't think we were losing sales by not having wifi," says Avi Mannis, senior executive at Hawaiian Airlines, which recently adopted Starlink.

"But it was a real disappointment for people when they got on board to find there was no signal."

As for cost: "My view is the reason that most airlines charge for it is not to recover the cost, because you don't. It's because with the last-generation technology, if everyone uses it at the same time, it would break down and be too slow." This is where Starlink has carved out its niche.

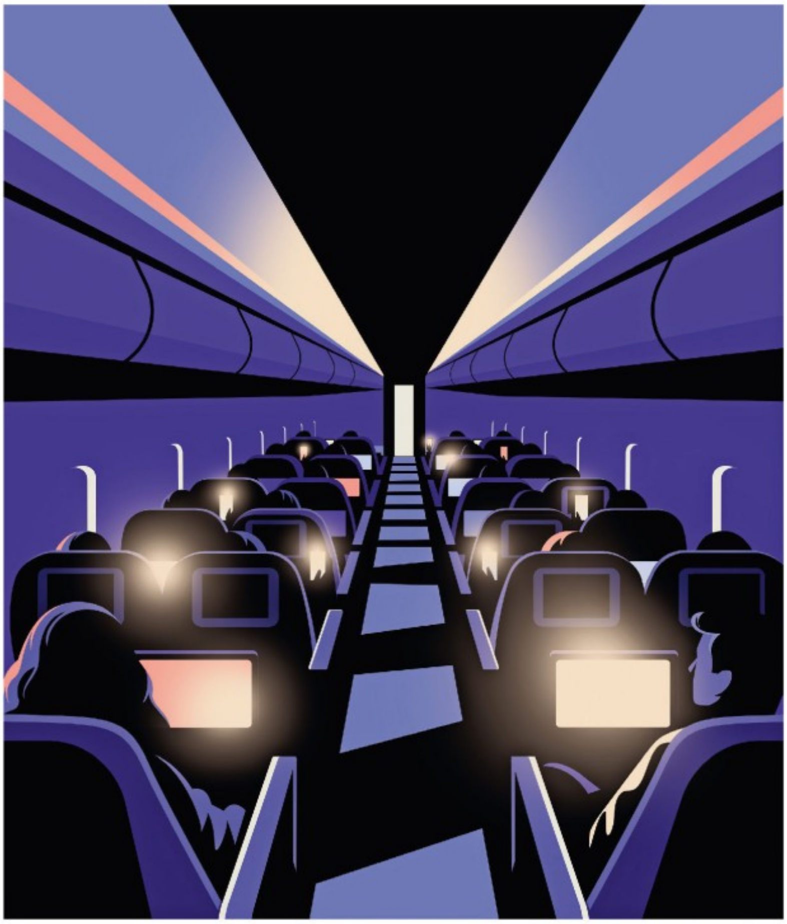
Beam me up, Starlink

So, how does inflight satellite connectivity work? Let's talk simple tech. Your phone connects to the plane's hotspot – straightforward enough. The aircraft has an antenna on its roof, beaming your data onwards to satellites. These relay signals between the aircraft and Earth.

But here's the thing. Some satellites orbit roughly 21,000 miles above the Earth. That means your data needs to travel the equivalent length of a return trip from London to Sydney, just to get from your plane up to the satellite. It needs to travel that distance *again* to get back down to Earth: and that all takes place within a few seconds. We may complain of slow inflight wifi speeds, but the concept remains rather amazing.

Starlink differs because its satellites hover around 330 miles above Earth. There's far less latency, because the distance your data travels is cut by 98%. Starlink also has over 6,400 satellites pumping out a combined 480Tbps of throughput. That's roughly 60,000,000MB/s.

Given that HD video only needs ~5Mbps to stream smoothly, you can see the potential for inflight video calling. Qatar Airways demonstrated this on its first Starlink-equipped flight in October 2024, when its CEO held an inflight video chat with Elon Musk, founder of Starlink's parent company SpaceX.



'Starlink's services offer a faster connection than I have at my own house'

Even so, speed isn't the only thing that airlines want. Flexibility has also been a sticking point, but other new tech is opening doors. Traditionally, airlines have one wifi provider per plane and install custom hardware to suit, a process that can take up to two weeks while the plane sits grounded and doesn't come cheap.

Airbus wants to change that through its new HBCplus system. With HBCplus, airlines will be able to switch inflight wifi providers like we toggle between eSIMs on our smartphones – bringing more competition on speed, price and service. It's early days, but Emirates and Ethiopian Airlines have already signed up for HBCplus on the A350.

Avoid the fee, browse for free

Starlink wasn't the catalyst for free inflight wifi. Emirates took the lead in 2014, unlocking the service for all, but speeds quickly crumbled. I recall waiting 29 minutes for a single webpage to load on a full A380 flight. Download speeds on Emirates' Boeing 777s were more usable, often around 1.5Mbps. The superjumbo's size saw it suffer, simply through so many passengers battling for bandwidth.

Changes followed, and now only Skywards Platinum members get free wifi from every seat. Others need the right 'status plus cabin' combination for browsing or messaging, or must pay to connect. Fortunately, today's speeds are far more usable than the initial free-for-all.

British Airways similarly grants free messaging to Executive Club members and gratis connectivity for guests flying in first class. Virgin Atlantic is less consistent, with pricing varying between aircraft. Services range from 20 minutes of free browsing on some planes to a £29.99 charge for a flight pass.

Singapore Airlines is following Emirates' early attempt. Wifi is now free for KrisFlyer members in any cabin – covering the bulk of the plane. A business class, first class or Suites boarding pass also does the trick. Cathay Pacific and Japan Airlines also provide free wifi at the pointy end.

Elsewhere, approaches can be less predictable. Air New Zealand and Qantas offer complimentary browsing on their respective domestic flights. But on long haul, Air NZ charges for the service while Qantas flies across oceans without connectivity – for now. But you can expect long-haul wifi to come with the airline's Project Sunrise flights.

Chinese carriers have been slow to adopt inflight browsing, particularly as smartphones still needed to be completely powered down in flight until 2018. But now, Air China, China Eastern, China Southern, Hainan Airlines and other Mainland Chinese carriers offer it on selected flights.

Low-cost carriers meanwhile prove a rarity when hunting for wifi. You won't find it on easyJet, IndiGo, Jetstar or Ryanair. Scoot is one of the exceptions, but you'll pay to connect – and in economy, you'll pay extra to have the inflight power switched on!

Over at Qatar Airways, Starlink will roll out across the airline's entire modern fleet within two years. Board a Starlink-equipped plane and you'll enjoy free browsing for the whole flight. In the meantime, Privilege Club members can connect for an hour at no charge.

Starlink will also stretch its wings on Air France, Delta and United "soon", while Turkish Airlines plans to remove all connectivity fees by the end of 2025.

The future of inflight wifi

The driving force for change with inflight wifi centres on two aspects: availability and speed. Starlink has both of those points bolted down. This will inevitably lead to reduced costs for travellers as many airlines trend towards complimentary connectivity, just as hotels did.

For carriers that keep fees in place, we can expect legacy systems to continue transitioning from data-based plans to time-based options. Given how much of our lives now takes place in the cloud, charging per MB just feel archaic.

Some carriers are also beginning to accept payment using miles. American Airlines is a recent adopter of that strategy, joining others seeking to soften the blow of being charged for a connection. My prediction? Inflight wifi is still evolving, but inflight cellular roaming will one

→

TROUBLESHOOTING

Tips to manage inflight wifi

Black spots

Even with new tech, the long journey taken by your data can cause dropouts, slow speeds and high latency. Certain countries also ban internet within their airspace or impose restrictions on data handling. International airlines often deactivate the service over India for this reason. Remember too that aircraft usually run just one external internet connection. Your data shares that invisible line with everybody else, creating bottlenecks to slower speeds.

Protect your data

Using public wifi brings about security concerns. Inflight networks are usually unencrypted, making data easy for others to intercept. Using a VPN can help mitigate these risks by encrypting your traffic between your device and a server on the ground. That's the case even if the hotspot itself isn't secured. Frankly, I never connect to inflight wifi without using a VPN – and the same is true of wifi in the lounge.

Multiple devices

If you're paying for a connection, be alert that some plans will only work via the device you buy them on. If you're toting the typical tablet/laptop and smartphone combination, don't expect that your plan will follow your browsing habits unless that's advertised. It may not be essential, but it's quite pleasant changing from 'work mode' on a laptop to 'social media mode' on a smartphone, especially if your pass follows along.

IMAGES GETTY

→

day make wifi redundant in the air. Technology can now enable an aircraft to emulate a mobile phone network, with inbuilt 'picocells' creating sky-high phone towers. When powered up at cruising altitude, passengers' mobile devices can then connect to the web via 4G.

It's already taking off. A host of airlines are offering or introducing this across their connected fleets. Emirates and Etihad, for instance, already have this available on selected flights. Rather than needing a credit card to connect to the traditional wifi hotspot, data usage is billed by the traveller's mobile phone provider in the same way as other roaming charges. Some providers now even offer plans that include inflight roaming as standard.

All in all, it's quite seamless, when it works. But as certain networks may continue to charge inflated roaming prices for every single megabyte, the plane's traditional wifi hotspot remains a confident alternative. In either case, your data still travels via the same satellite, bound for its own destination back on Earth. And these days, it'll be there before you blink. **BT**

INFLIGHT WIFI AT A GLANCE

AIRLINE	PRICE	CAN YOU CONNECT ON MULTIPLE DEVICES?
American Airlines	Packages from US$10 to US$20. Pay monthly and pay annually options too.	Only via monthly or annual plans
Air France	Free for Flying Blue Ultimate and La Première passengers, otherwise from €3 to €30. Can be bought with miles.	No
British Airways	Free for Executive Club Members and passengers in First. Packages range from £1.99 to £21.99.	No
Cathay Pacific	Free wifi for passengers in first and business class. Otherwise, prices vary from US$9.95 to US$19.95.	Yes, but not simultaneously
Delta *All aircraft connected	Free for SkyMiles members on select aircraft, or packages range from US$4 to US$39.95. There are pay monthly and pay annually options too.	Yes
Emirates *All aircraft connected	From US$2.99 to US$19.99. Free for Emirates Skywards Blue members in First, Gold and Silver members in Business and First, and Platinum members in any cabin class.	Yes
Etihad Airways	First and Etihad Guest Platinum and Diamond members get free Surf packages. Otherwise US$9.99 (or 1,200 Etihad Guest Miles) to US$24.99 (3,000 Etihad Guest Miles).	Yes, but not simultaneously
Finnair	Packages range from €7.95 to €24.95.	No
Gulf Air	Free	Yes
KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	Free for Flying Blue Ultimate and Hippocampe flyers. Otherwise €10 to €38.	Yes, but not simultaneously
Lufthansa	Packages range from €3 to €25.	Yes
Qantas	Free	Yes
Qatar Airways	Free on Starlink-enabled aircraft, otherwise from US$5. Privilege Club members get one hour free.	Yes, but not simultaneously
Singapore Airlines	Free for suites, first and business, PPS Club and KrisFlyer members. Otherwise, prices vary from US$3.99 to $15.99	No
Turkish Airlines	Free for business class passengers, Miles&Smiles Elite and Elite Plus members. Otherwise, US$5 to US$35.	Yes
United Airlines	Free messaging for all. From US$8 for MileagePlus members, otherwise from $10. T-Mobile customers get free wifi.	Yes, but only with MileagePlus account
Virgin Atlantic *All aircraft connected	Packages range from £2.99 to £29.99	Yes, but not simultaneously

Welcome to the new world of understanding

ADHD, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, on many people's lips, in the media. But why?

ADHD 360
MORE THAN YOUR DIAGNOSIS

Society has lived with the understanding that 'it's just for boys' along with the idea that 'you grow out of it'. We now find ourselves, globally, with under-funded and over stretched services for what is a significantly debilitating problem.

ADHD doesn't respect gender, nor age, with many patients now in their senior years realising their struggles have a reason and can be helped. From the age of 6, to 80+, over 5% of the population who have ADHD are now turning to healthcare providers for help.

ADHD can be helped, with a combination of appropriate help, medication and understanding, allowing people to 'validate' their lifelong struggles. Is the title of ADHD fit for purpose? We need to move the dial, to find a more appropriate name for what is an easily helped and often overlooked illness suffered in ignorance by far too many people.

Welcome to the new world of understanding and hopefully a new, more appropriate label.

Dr Phil Anderton, PhD, is the CEO of ADHD 360, one of the largest and the world's most successful neurodiversity clinics.

www.adhd-360.com

IMAGES SAM POWER/UNSPLASH

2025

Travel wish list

Looking for travel inspiration for the year ahead?
We ask our team of international editors what's on their radar

BHUTAN

KHURSHEED MISTRY
CONSULTING EDITOR, *BUSINESS TRAVELLER* INDIA

THE KINGDOM OF BHUTAN has long captured my imagination, earning a coveted spot on my travel bucket list for its stunning landscapes, vibrant culture, inherent spirituality and commitment to sustainability.

This scintillating Himalayan gem embodies old-world tranquillity and is renowned for its breathtaking mountains, lush valleys and serene monasteries. Not to mention, the country's commitment to Gross National Happiness ensures visitors are able to appreciate its unique way of life.

One of Bhutan's most captivating aspects is its colourful festivals, or *tshechus*, which showcase the country's rich heritage and spirituality. The Paro Tshechu, celebrated in spring, is particularly alluring with its mesmerising mask dances, traditional music and the grand unveiling of the sacred *thangka* (silk painting).

Bhutanese cuisine and local flavours also excite me. I can't wait to try the national dish, *ema datshi* – a spicy cheese and chilli dish, alongside other delicious offerings like momos and red rice.

CHRISTMAS ISLAND

NICK GOODYER EDITOR,
BUSINESS TRAVELLER ASIA-PACIFIC

I'M DRAWN TO REMOTE ISLANDS. What I like about them is they're always slightly quirky and decidedly different from the countries that own them. Christmas Island (the Indian Ocean one) is chiefly famous for its annual mass migration of crabs, which makes it a hit with David Attenborough and other TV naturalists. It's also a haven for seabirds, and the guano deposits that have built up over millennia have resulted in a lucrative phosphate mining operation. The diving is spectacular, as you'd expect in pollution-free waters, and the beaches are also incredible – if a car is parked on the track, you drive on and find a deserted one. Not that there are many tourists – the island only gets about 3,000 visitors a year.

KATHMANDU

TIJN KRAMER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF,
BUSINESS TRAVELLER THE NETHERLANDS

SOMETIMES I ENJOY the anticipation of a trip as much as actually travelling. One upcoming highlight is the IATA Annual General Meeting, a short but powerful meeting of airline leaders, which will be taking place in Delhi in June. I'll be keeping a close eye on the rapid development of Indian airlines. Where Europe seems to be reaching the limits of growth, the sky over India seems to be the limit – a story that screams to be written (watch this space!). And in the spirit of combining the useful with the pleasant, it will give me the opportunity to finally fly onwards to Kathmandu, Nepal – hopefully my 132nd destination – to do a scenic tour of Mount Everest. Speaking of (high)lights...!

KAZAKHSTAN

YI-HWA HANNA EDITOR,
BUSINESS TRAVELLER MIDDLE EAST

I LOVE EXPLORING destinations and finding hidden gems. I've been to more than 60 countries (so far!) but there are always more amazing places to discover. In 2024, Bosnia & Herzegovina was a highlight for me, but in 2025, I'd like to explore more of Central Asia. I went hiking in Kyrgyzstan's Jyrgalan Valley seven years ago and it was one of the most stunning, remote places I've ever seen. Camping in the wilderness near the Kazakh border is an experience that will stay with me forever, and now, I'd like to visit the other side of the Trans-Ili Alatau mountains, in Kazakhstan. I predict Kazakhstan will be a big destination for 2025. There's so much natural beauty in Almaty, from Kolsai Lake to the sunken 'frozen forest' at Lake Kaindy and the otherworldly Charyn Canyon National Park, that it's perfect for those looking to jump on the burnout-beating trend of escapist travel in nature. Astrotourism is another trend the region can accommodate, with stargazing enthusiasts able to get their fix at the Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory, or the Assy-Turgen plateau. The city has plenty for culture vultures too – the second edition of the Triennale of Sound Art and New Music is due to open there in October 2025.

ST MORITZ, SWITZERLAND

MICHAEL MÖSER
EDITOR, *BUSINESS TRAVELLER* GERMANY

ST. MORITZ IN WINTER. Images immediately come to mind of the elite snow polo tournament on the frozen lake, fast bobsleigh rides, expensive sports cars and thick fur coats. But for me, skiing in the Engadin is at the top of the list. The piste area is known to be one of the finest the world has to offer. Luckily for me, I received an invite from an old friend who lives in Bergell, a 45-minute drive south of St. Moritz. It's an ancient stone village where time seems to have stood still – just like the mountain villages on old black and white postcards.

Skiing days are elevated by wonderful mountain panoramas, perfect slopes and top Swiss service. When I last visited my ski buddy, we skied both sides of the valley of St. Moritz – from Piz Nair and Corviglia to the slopes of Corvatsch and the Diavolezza. Come March, when the sun's rays unleash their gentle power, but the snow is still perfectly powdery, skiing here becomes pure enjoyment, and all business is forgotten.

→

GOOD-TO-KNOW

On engadin.ch there is the "Sleep + Ski" offer, where you can get a ski pass for just CHF47 per night in one of 100 Engadin hotels.

> 'Skiing days are elevated by wonderful mountain panoramas, perfect slopes and top Swiss service'

IMAGES RAIMOND KLAVINS, SYRA METTIER, SAM POWER/UNSPLASH; DAVID KLEYN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; PANAGIOTIS PAPADOPOULOS/GETTY

‘The train acts as the ultimate luxury transfer to the mystical Inca citadel’

CUSCO, PERU

HANNAH BRANDLER
DEPUTY EDITOR, *BUSINESS TRAVELLER*

IF, LIKE ME, South America is at the top of your bucket list then follow in the footsteps of Paddington’s latest adventure and prioritise a trip to the Peruvian city of Cusco in 2025. The capital of the Inca empire has much to impart on 21st-century travellers – its worship of Pachamama (Mother Earth) an uplifting approach to life in today’s worrisome climate.

Encircled by snowy peaks and sacred Andean lands is a historic town consisting of anti-seismic Inca ruins, Spanish colonial plazas, vibrant street art and copious bowls of chunky ceviche – none of the wafer-thin nonsense you’re served at expensive impersonators overseas.

Cusco is best known as the gateway to Machu Picchu, accessible by the adventurous 42km Inca trail or the stylish Belmond rail alternative. The Hiram Bingham train acts as the ultimate luxury transfer to the mystical Inca citadel, dazzling with a civilised dining experience, vintage interiors and scenic routes through the Peruvian jungle – plus an open-air platform for astonishing photo backdrops. The destination is all the more impressive, particularly when mist clears to reveal the magical lands of Machu Picchu. And get ready for an energetic return rail trip, where a cocktail carriage descends into dancing thanks to a live band and (one too) many pisco sours.

LAS VEGAS

ERIC NEWILL
EDITOR, *BUSINESS TRAVELER* US

LONG A SHOWCASE for the extravagant, Las Vegas continues to top itself with ever more fantastic properties and attractions. After recently launching both the Sphere – a futuristic circular arena featuring a 16K wraparound screen as its facade – and the lavish Fontainebleau hotel (at 67 stories, the state's tallest occupiable structure), the city is anticipating an even more gargantuan resort, LVXP, which will include a trio of towers, a Wet 'n Wild waterpark and an 18,000-seat basketball stadium. Meanwhile, the Oakland A's are relocating to Las Vegas this season, playing in nearby Summerlin while awaiting a domed ballpark designed by pioneering Danish architect Bjarke Ingels. On the dining front, *Yellowstone* creator Taylor Sheridan has opened Four Sixes Ranch Steakhouse inside the Wynn, a Texas-barbecue-driven concept that's going up against a new outpost of New York's iconic Peter Luger Steak House at Caesars Palace.

AMSTERDAM

EDEN HERBSTMAN, MANAGING EDITOR,
BUSINESS TRAVELER US

TREE-SHADED CANALS, bike-friendly paths and tulip-drenched fields have painted fantasies of Amsterdam in my mind for years, and I can't think of a better time to visit the Dutch capital than in 2025 for its 750th birthday. The city is looking pretty spectacular for such an age, with new hotels like Rosewood Amsterdam leaving their mark. I plan to spend time exploring renowned institutions such as Rijksmuseum, Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam and Concertgebouw, which will host 'Dutch Heritage: ode to Thelonious Monk' in January, before hopping on a river cruise to enjoy the city by water. Hidden speakeasy Door 74 is top of my list for its seasonal cocktail menu – and I'll be building in recovery time at Badhuis, Amsterdam's oldest sauna dating back to 1903.

'It is laden with all the fairytale charm tourists look for in a European destination'

WROCŁAW, POLAND

ALICE HENDERSON EDITORIAL ASSISTANT, *BUSINESS TRAVELLER*

DRIFTING ON 12 ISLANDS cut with winding canals, and an assortment of 130 bridges to rival Venice, Wrocław is laden with all the fairytale charm tourists look for in a European destination. The shining Cathedral Island neighbourhood was my favourite – it's the oldest part of the city, with a gothic cathedral and a princely castle, and is accessed only by a steely green bridge. At nightfall, the cobblestones and bare brickwork glow orange at the hand of a 19th-century-style lamplighter who rounds the streets every evening. Another highlight is exploring Wrocław University: pearly baroque columns and pastel frescoes, and an excellent viewpoint to see the city from. While wandering the city, look for pint-sized gnome statues around the pavement. What began as a peaceful protest against the Soviet regime in the 1980s has become a quirky attraction for visitors – the stock trader gnome is a must-see. Wrocław ticks all the boxes for travellers in 2025 looking for off-the-beaten-path destinations. **BT**

IMAGES **MAX VAN DEN OETELAAR, HENKI/UNSPLASH; FRANCISCO GONCALVES/GETTY; MATT HIND**

GIFT GUIDE

Celebrate the festive season with our pick of treasures for your loved ones – or treat yourself with a well-deserved reward after a jam-packed year of business travels

MEZE AUDIO 105 AER HEADPHONES *£359;* mezeaudio.com

R1S SMART RADIO *£350;* shop.kitkemp.com

TECH & *LIFESTYLE*

OURA RING 4, HEALTH AND FITNESS TRACKER SMART RING, GOLD EDITION *£499;* ouraring.com

MOLESKINE CASA BATLLÓ NOTEBOOK AND PEN SET *£58;* selfridges.com

DOCK & BAY TRAVEL TOWEL, MARINE DREAM *£28;* johnlewis.com

SWAINE CIGAR HUMIDOR 120 *£5,000;* swaine.london

PELOTON BIKE *£1,599;* johnlewis.com

LOEWE WE. HEAR PRO BLUETOOTH SPEAKER X KYLIAN MBAPPÉ *£249.99;* loewe.tv

BEAUTY & FASHION

COMFORT ZONE THE NIGHT GARDEN NOURISHING GLOW FACE KIT *£129;* uk.comfortzoneskin.com

IWC PORTUGIESER HAND-WOUND TOURBILLON DAY & NIGHT *£66,500;* iwc.com

V&A THE GREAT MUGHALS WASH BAG *£25;* vam.ac.uk

CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN SO KATE SUEDE HEELED BOOTS *£950;* harrods.com

JIMMY FAIRLY THE LILY SUNGLASSES *£135;* jimmyfairly.co.uk

DIPTYQUE ADVENT CALENDAR *£390;* diptyqueparis.com

PRADA SAFFIANO LEATHER BRIEFCASE *£3,400;* harrods.com

MONTBLANC HAPPY HOLIDAYS CABIN TROLLEY *£975;* montblanc.com

BARBOUR HERITAGE 'FOR HIM' EAU DE PARFUM 50ML GIFT SET *£56;* thefragranceshop.co.uk

IMAGES PATRICK PARCHET; NEIL WATSON

ST GERMAIN X ISSY GRANGER COCKTAIL SET *£95*; harveynichols.com

YETI RAMBLER BOTTLE 769ML *£40*; selfridges.com

DOM PÉRIGNON VINTAGE 2015 X JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT SPECIAL EDITION 75CL *£220*; selfridges.com

FORTNUM & MASON JINGLE BELLS MUSICAL TIN with chocolate and caramel shortbread *£16.95*; fortnumandmason.com

N25 KALUGA CAVIAR 30G *£180*; n25caviar.co.uk

PENTIRE ADRIFT ALCOHOL-FREE SPIRIT 70CL *£27.80*; pentiredrinks.com

FOOD & DRINK

JOHNNIE WALKER BLUE LABEL ICE CHALET 70CL *£325*; masterofmalt.com

MARIAGE FRÈRES NOËL ROYAL FESTIVE BLACK TEA *£28*; mariagefreres.com

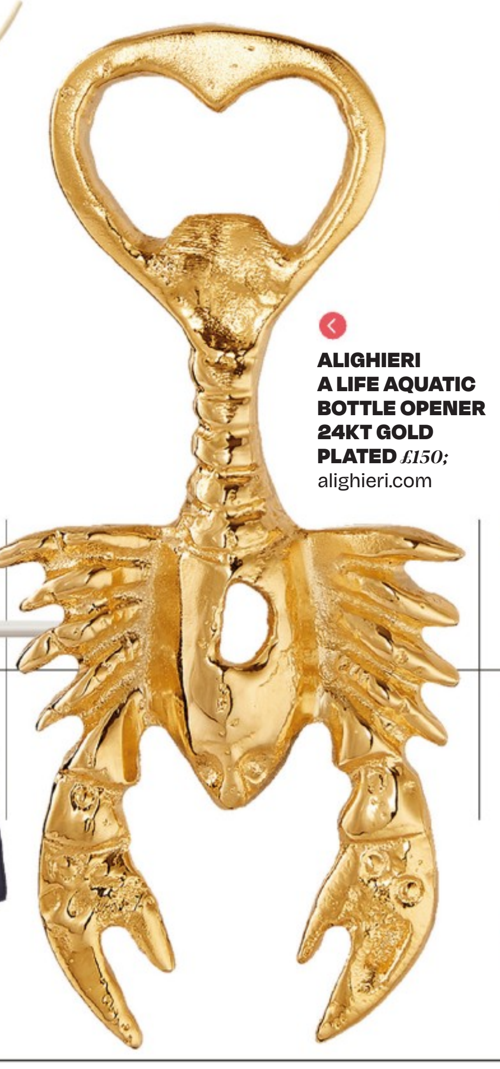
HOME COMFORTS

GREENPAN X TUCCI ALUMINIUM CASSEROLE 26CM
£299.95; johnlewis.com

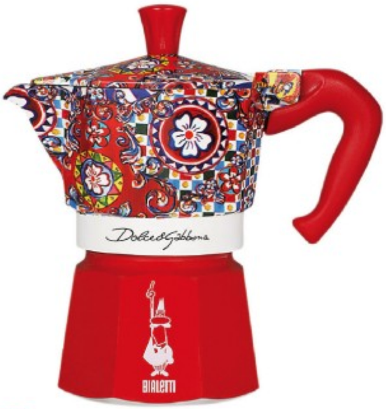
BAMFORD CINNAMON AND CLOVE CHRISTMAS DIFFUSER 250ML
£69.50; bamford.com

NEOM WELLBEING PERFECT PEACE HOME MIST 30ML
£16; neomwellbeing.com

EMBER TEMPERATURE CONTROLLED MUG 2, COPPER EDITION
£179.95; uk.ember.com

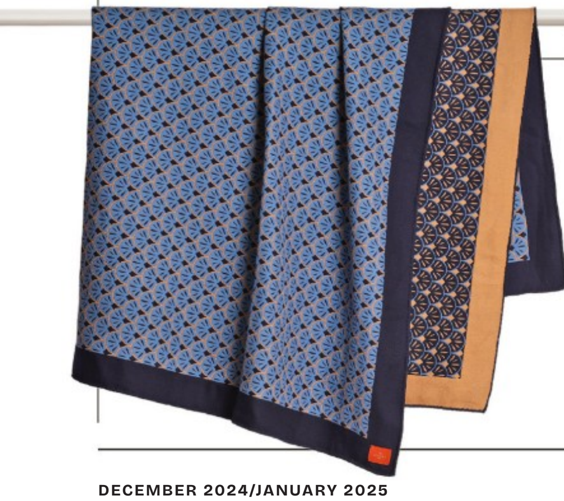


ALIGHIERI A LIFE AQUATIC BOTTLE OPENER 24KT GOLD PLATED *£150;*
alighieri.com



BIALETTI X DOLCE & GABBANA SICILIAN CARRETTO MOKA EXPRESS HOB ESPRESSO COFFEE MAKER
£75; johnlewis.com

SWAINE MERINO WOOL VERSAILLES THROW
£490; swaine.london



ASSOULINE MIAMI BEACH, TRAVEL FROM HOME CANDLE
£75; assouline.com

SPONSORED CONTENT

Winter Eats

Explore the best restaurants on our radar this festive season

GERMAN

Sühring, Bangkok

Experience the culinary delights of award-winning chefs Thomas & Mathias Sühring, the owners of Sühring, a two Michelin-starred modern German restaurant located in the heart of Bangkok. The German twins developed a passion for cooking during their childhood, where they would forage and harvest at their grandmother's farm and the surrounding forests and lakes. Their grandmother's love for cooking meant that the kitchen was their playground, where they were introduced to the pillars of German cuisine – fermentation, pickling, smoking, drying, and curing. These memories ignited an obsession for cooking that continues to this day. Their lifelong respect for produce and seasonality has sharpened their philosophy of bringing authenticity to the table, grounded in the principles of German cuisine but also delivering a sense of place from their years spent in Asia. With inspiration from family recipes spanning back generations, Sühring serves you the best of modern German fare. With their dedication to use only the finest and freshest ingredients, every meal is transformed into an exquisite gastronomic experience.

No. 10 | Yen Akat Soi 3 | Chongnonsi | Yannawa | 10120 | Bangkok ,+66 (0) 2287 1799
info@restaurantsuhring.com
restaurantsuhring.com

FRENCH

Burgundy By Matthieu, Lyon

Burgundy By Matthieu is a culinary gem in the heart of Lyon, where Michelin-starred chef Matthieu Girardon crafts exquisite dishes that celebrate the essence of French gastronomy. Each plate is a masterpiece, showcasing seasonal ingredients and innovative techniques. Complement your meal with the restaurant's selection of Burgundy wines, blending elegance and tradition in a warm, inviting atmosphere.

24 Quai St Antoine 69002 Lyon,
+33 4 72 04 04 51
info@burgundybym.fr
burgundybym.fr

ASIAN

Izakaya, Munich

At IZAKAYA Asian Kitchen & Bar Munich, extravagant Japanese cuisine meets vibrant Peruvian flavours. Authentic elements get a contemporary twist – not just on the menu, but throughout the whole restaurant. After its 2012 debut in Amsterdam, IZAKAYA expanded to Munich, where it now resides on the ground floor of Roomers, catering to curious travellers from all over the globe. If you appreciate contemporary dining, you'll love this.

Landsberger Str. 68, Munich 80339,
+49 89 1 222 320 00
info@izakaya-munich.com
izakaya-restaurant.com/munich/about

CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE

Myazu, Riyadh

Myazu has been designed with the precise needs of a cosmopolitan market in mind, bringing you a unique, world-class experience in an extraordinary setting. Myazu's philosophy revolves around attention to detail, tangible in its selection of the finest ingredients and its expertly trained team. The mood at Myazu is enhanced with a curated playlist and intricate wood panelling for a stimulating, yet relaxed atmosphere.

Musad Bin Jalawi St, Riyadh 12244
+966 9200 09686
enquiries@myazu.com
myazu.com

FINE DINING

Fitzgerald, Rotterdam

Located in the heart of Rotterdam, Fitzgerald has proudly held its Michelin star for seven years. Chef Michael Verhagen combines modern French cuisine with global accents, inspired by his Surinamese roots alongside international influences from Japan and Spain. Guests can enjoy exquisite 4- to 7-course menus or dine à la carte, with sommelier Duco de Leeuw curating the perfect wine pairing.

Gelderseplein 49, 3011 WZ, Rotterdam,
+31 10 2687010
info@restaurantfitzgerald.com
restaurantfitzgerald.com

STEAKHOUSE

MR PORTER, Barcelona

Since opening in Amsterdam in 2015, MR PORTER Steakhouse, Bar & Lounge has redefined the modern steakhouse experience, where elegance mingles with high energy, and dining borders on indulgence. In Barcelona, MR PORTER welcomes guests from lunch to dinner, with their Sunday roast adding a delicious twist to your weekend lineup. As the restaurant prepares for its London debut in early 2025, the journey of excellence continues.

Carrer del Rosselló, 265 Barcelona 08008, +34 932711245
info@mrportersteakhouse.es
mrportersteakhouse.com/barcelona

ASIAN

Qura Bar, Hong Kong

Qura Bar is a feast for the senses. Unforgettable evenings begin and end here, thanks to an eclectic sensory journey through a cosy lounge, a stunning bar, and even an intimate cigar haven. Blending traditional glamour with Art Deco and vintage accents, Qura Bar is home to a collection of exceptional drinks, rare spirits, Riviera-inspired culinary delights, and electrifying harbour views.

Regent Hong Kong, 18 Salisbury Road,
Kowloon, Hong Kong, +852 2313 2313
dining.regenthk@ihg.com
hongkong.regenthotels.com/dining-destination/qura/

MEDITERRANEAN

Maray, Manchester

In Manchester's bustling business district you'll find Maray, an inviting sharing-plates restaurant with a calming yet vibrant atmosphere. Awarded as the Leading Casual Restaurant in the This is Manchester Awards, Maray is inspired by the cultural hotspot of Le Marais in Paris, serving up tasty dishes inspired by the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

14 Brazennose St, Manchester M2 6LW,
0151 347 0214
manchester@maray.co.uk
maray.co.uk

CHINESE

Gouqi, London

Embark on a culinary journey at the esteemed Gouqi restaurant. Led by Michelin-star chef Tong Chee Hwee, Gouqi promises a luxury dining experience like no other. Explore Gouqi's authentic Chinese cuisine with specialties like Peking duck or a dim sum platter. With a capacity of 100 covers, two private dining rooms, and an Asian-inspired cocktail bar, Gouqi offers an ideal setting for exclusive events. It is a rising star that you won't want to miss.

25-34 Cockspur St, London, SW1Y 5BN,
020 3771 8886
reservations@gouqi-restaurants.co.uk
gouqi-restaurants.co.uk

INDIAN

Tamarind Tribeca, New York

Tamarind Tribeca, an iconic Indian restaurant in New York, embodies the elegance of traditional Indian hospitality. Nestled in the vibrant Tribeca neighbourhood, its grand ambience features high ceilings, warm lighting, and sophisticated decor that exudes luxury. Tamarind's innovative menu blends authentic Indian flavors with contemporary presentations, offering dishes that delight the palate. Impeccable service, infused with genuine warmth, elevates the dining experience to unforgettable heights.

99 Hudson street, New York, NY 10013, +1 212-775-9000
tamarindnyc@gmail.com
tamarindtribeca.com

AIRLINE REVIEW
Emirates Boeing 777 business

HOTEL REVIEWS
Moxy Brooklyn Williamsburg + more

CAR REVIEW
Mercedes Benz AMG GT 63

RESTAURANT REVIEW
Kanishka by Atul Kochhar, London

Review

Putting business travel to the test

Emirates
الإمارات
www.emirates.com

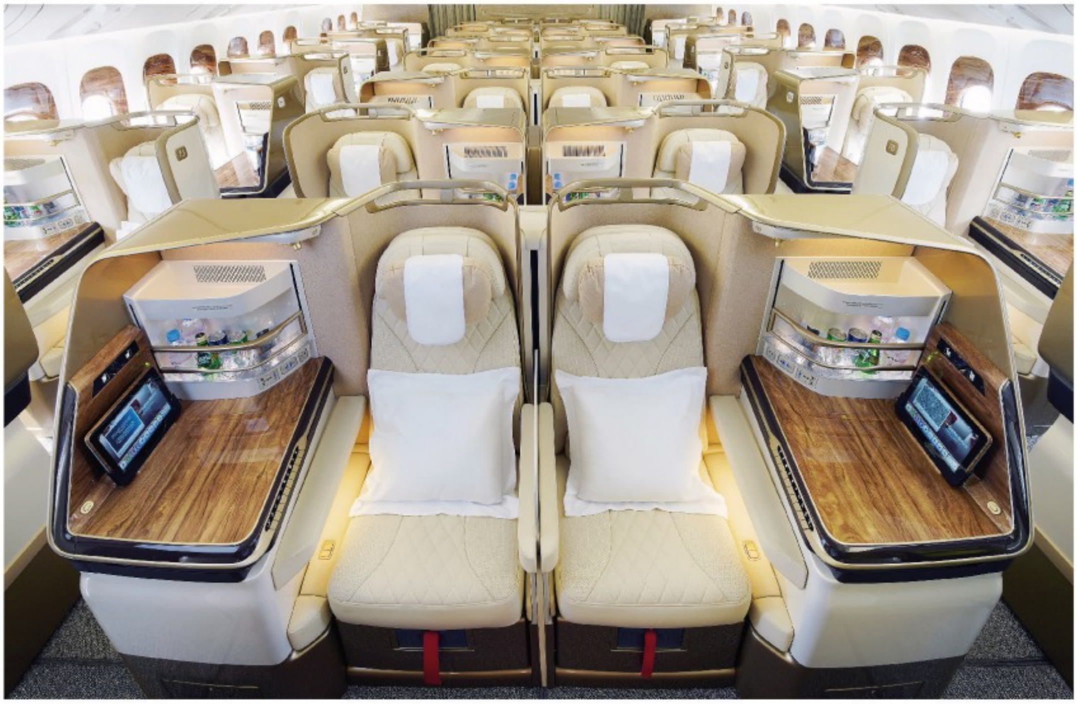
FLIGHT REVIEW

Emirates Boeing 777 business class

Brussels to Tokyo

FLIGHT Review

WORDS
ANDREAS SPAETH



An updated business class cabin offers a mixed experience

Background

Launched in August, the refreshed Boeing 777 cabin serves routes like Brussels, Zurich and Tokyo Haneda, with plans to roll out to six US destinations by February. Emirates eventually plans to refurbish 81 planes.

Boarding

The boarding process in Brussels was a breeze as I was the last premium passenger. Dubai was a different story, with its typically crowded gates, but arriving late worked in my favour and I boarded swiftly.

The seat

The new 1-2-1 setup eliminates the middle seats of the old 2-3-2 layout, but there's a lack of privacy. There are no sliding doors or partitions – just you and the aisle. The seats themselves are comfortable, made from soft cream leather, with a generous 20.7-inch width and up to 44-inch pitch. When fully reclined, the bed measures 78.6 inches, and with a padded mattress cover, it's quite cosy. Two USB-C ports and updated power outlets are practical. One downside is the lack of personal storage.

The flight

Emirates doesn't provide amenity kits on shorter flights, though slippers and eye-shades are at every seat. I was surprised by the lack of printed menus. Instead, passengers scan a QR code using the IFE system. The wifi worked instantly, with Skywards members given free messaging services, though full internet access comes at a cost (from US$9.99 to $19.99).

The dining experience started with a preordered fish *sayadieh* – a baked cod dish served with fragrant rice. It was filling but not particularly memorable. The poached scallop appetiser was more pleasing, and the meal was paired with a glass of Veuve Clicquot Vintage 2015 Champagne.

Unfortunately, my seat adjustment buttons malfunctioned during the flight, but I could still control my seat through the touchpad.

We landed in Dubai on schedule, around midnight. The following morning, I boarded my onward flight to Tokyo. This time, Emirates provided a lavish Bulgari amenity kit and a pair of light, silky pyjamas.

Breakfast choices were a Japanese kaiseki bento, banana pancakes or a cheese and basil omelette. I opted for the latter, followed by a nap. The main meal was a delightful kaiseki bento with duck, eel and squid alongside a chilled bottle of Nanbu Bijin sake.

Unfortunately, the wifi did not work on this flight.

Arrival

We arrived in Tokyo 15 minutes early. Haneda is the most convenient airport in the city and while there was a long line at immigration, the process was smooth and efficient. In no time, I was on my way to my hotel in Roppongi, thanks to the airline's excellent chauffeur service for business class passengers. **BT**

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The window seats – especially 3A (my seat) and 6A – are recommended, offering more personal space and privacy

VERDICT

The updated Boeing 777 Business Class offers a refined experience but is not groundbreaking. The window seats provide excellent privacy, but aisle seats lack seclusion. The lack of personal storage space and a dine-on-demand service are also drawbacks, but for a reliable long-haul business class experience, this is a solid option.

BEST FOR

The seat's comfort and quality of the inflight service remains top-notch in Emirates' updated 777 cabins

PRICE

Return business class flights from Brussels to Tokyo start from around £3,800

CONTACT

emirates.com

IMAGES COURTESY OF EMIRATES; NOBUTOSHI KURISU; CHAD SLATTERY

WORDS
RIC STOCKFIS

Casa de las Artes, Madrid

The Meliá Collection's debut in mainland Spain has an artistic wow factor

What's it like?
It's not often that a hotel builds its identity around fine arts, let alone all seven of them. But when you've taken up residence in Madrid's literary heart – the Barrio de las Letras – it makes perfect sense. The latest addition to The Meliá Collection's portfolio of one-of-a-kind hotels opened in October and draws inspiration from the neighbourhood's most famous resident: playwright, poet and author, Miguel de Cervantes (of *Don Quixote* fame).

Mere minutes from Atocha station, the Retiro and Plaza Mayor, the hotel is tucked between Calle Atocha and Calle Moratín. It gives little away from the outside, but on entering, it's clear that architect Álvaro Sans, of Spanish studio ASAH, has created a series of inspiring and unusual spaces, across more than one interlinked building.

Rooms
The 137 rooms range from Superior Singles (at 16 sqm, these are a little snug) to spectacular suites with private terraces and outdoor bathtubs, all inspired by the Spanish Golden Age.

Design is elegant and warm – lots of ochre, brown and gold tones – with interior designer Adriana Sans bringing her father's graceful and contemporary vision to life.

The hotel also showcases beautiful artworks, with Gustave Doré's engravings for the 1869 edition of *Don Quixote* displayed in every room – while Dalí lithographs are on show at reception.

The small- to mid-size rooms aren't exactly designed for working from (just a small-ish table near the window), but we spent hours in the quiet of the library, only retreating to take calls. And in the Deluxe Room (26 sqm) we were undisturbed by noise, despite the roadside location.

Facilities
Even the gym here ties back to the arts, with ballet barre representing dance. There's an in-house screening room, a stunning library and live music performances in various spaces, plus an extensive collection of bookable experiences, from tapas tours and cooking classes to dramatic poetry readings. Altogether, an impressive venue at which to host a party or even corporate event. And, while the thermal pool, sauna and steam room don't necessarily speak to poets of the past, they're still a delightful place to hang out.

GOOD-TO-KNOW

If you sleep well on the DreamMaker mattress, you can buy your own from Meliá online, starting from €840.

VERDICT

Centrally located and genuinely memorable, this is an ideal base for mixing culture and customer relationships on your next visit to the Spanish capital.

BEST FOR

Leaving Madrid rather more cultured than you arrived

DON'T MISS

The stained-glass windows and sky-high ceilings at international and Madrilenian fusion restaurant MACHÉ, housed in the former Spanish Railways Association building

PRICE
From €208 per night

CONTACT
Calle de Atocha, 83
Madrid; +34 913 30 05 00;
melia.com

IMAGES **RUBEN ORTIZ**

WORDS
GEMMA GREENWOOD

The Hotel Maria, Helsinki

The hotel introduces a new era of luxury Nordic hospitality to the Finnish capital

What's it like?
Blending old-world charm with modern design, the property is housed within four historic buildings, with original details preserved throughout.

Owned by three-time Olympic gold medallist Samppa Lajunen, it is protected by the Finnish Heritage Agency, Green Key certified and recognised by Sustainable Travel Finland. It is also part of Preferred Hotels & Resorts' Legend Collection and Historic Hotels Worldwide.

At first glance, Hotel Maria is a sophisticated city hotel, but when further explored, a wellness destination unfolds.

Located in Kruununhaka, Helsinki's upmarket residential district, it's a ten-minute stroll from the city centre, Presidential Palace, Senate Square and must-visit Oodi library.

Rooms
With 117 rooms, including 38 suites, each unique thanks to original features, it's worth doing your homework before booking. Some suites offer saunas, steam rooms, terraces and Jacuzzis, and there are plenty of interconnecting room options. Just a heads up: some rooms have Queen beds, others have King-size. My Deluxe Room felt like a mini suite with a separate living area, sofa, TV, coffee table, minibar and safe. The en-suite had a walk-in rain shower, bathtub, double vanity and Bulgari amenities. Fluffy towels, robes and comfy slippers were a perfect touch, along with high-end linens and chic lighting – including a chandelier.

Facilities
For Nordic and international cuisine, Garden Terrace is perfect for lunch or dinner, with courtyard seating in summer, while fine dining at Lilja fuses French and Finnish flavours. Don't miss drinks at the cosy Bar Maria, where Finnish gin steals the show, while breakfast at Lilja is a treat too, with local berries and great coffee.

Venue options include the light-filled Maria Ballroom (up to 100 standing), the Valley room (seats 12), and the Lily room (up to four people).

For relaxation and rejuvenation, head to the Wellness Club's fitness centre and The Maria Spa – arguably the hotel's focal point. The serene spa reflects the Finnish tradition of wellness, offering a traditional sauna, steam room, cold plunge pool, a hot tub and an experience pool. The centrepiece is a beautiful glass-roofed atrium with a fountain, daybeds and a fireplace, providing a calming atmosphere. The fitness centre provides a great mix of equipment, plus a mirrored studio for classes. **BT**

VERDICT

Hotel Maria oozes Finnish-style refined but relaxed luxury. It bathes you in light, cocoons you in warmth, and indulges you with gastronomic treats and wellness experiences. The hotel suits all types of travellers and is a great base from which to explore the city's highlights.

BEST FOR

Wellness breaks and weekend getaways

DON'T MISS

Spa time and drinks at Bar Maria – probably best in that order

PRICE
From £250 per night

CONTACT
Mariankatu 23, 00170 Helsinki;
+358 0 988600100;
hotelmaria.fi

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The hotel works with local farms to grow produce and rear reindeer

IMAGES MIKKO ALA PEIJARI; MICHELLE CHAPLOW/HOTEL ESSENCE PHOTOGRAPHY; KRISTA KELTANEN

WORDS
HANNAH BRANDLER

Moxy Brooklyn Williamsburg

Marriott's Moxy brand debuted in Brooklyn in March 2023, marking the brand's sixth property in New York

What's it like?
Located in Brooklyn's Williamsburg, the Moxy fits right into the home of hipsters with colourful murals and 20-foot-high ceilings that nod to the area's affinity for warehouses.

Interiors by BASILE Studio Hospitality and Lightstone Design Studio are bold, with pointillist depictions of Williamsburg Bridge, a crossword-style graphic in the lift, and an arcade machine in the lobby.

Guests get a sense of the vibe as soon as they reach Bedford Avenue, with music played on the sidewalk. Once you enter, the volume goes up a notch. A glass-walled facade provides a glimpse of the energy inside, while a Pop Art mural by D*Face stretches the length of the southern facade – depicting a woman in traffic exclaiming "Get me to the Moxy".

Nearby are indie bars, vintage shops and Domino Park.

GOOD-TO-KNOW

Head to the hotel's nightclub, Jolene, for DJ sets. Guests get priority access on Thursdays before 12am.

Rooms
Moxy is known for having small rooms. Here, 216 rooms with floor-to-ceiling windows range from 14-19 sqm, but the design maximises limited space – expect an open wardrobe, various pegs and hooks, plus a pull-out drawer beneath the bed housing a safe. A table folds down from the wall, although this only just fits a laptop and is not comfortable for working (Executive Rooms have a standalone desk).

Everything is modular, which suits some guests but irritates others. Also within the space is a walk-in shower cubicle with refillable toiletries, a toilet cubicle, and a sink in the main room with towels and a hairdryer.

There are well-placed plug and USB sockets, and a 50-inch Smart HDTV with streaming capabilities. However, it's stingy that Moxy charges for bottled water when the tap is not drinkable.

The room size didn't bother me, but the noise did. I tried to sleep amid the cacophony of corridor crawlers, the rail track outside and my neighbour's loud TV. Staff readily provide earplugs – helpful, but a signal of the hubbub. Avoid higher floors due to roaring rooftop tunes.

Facilities
The F&B spaces are wonderful. Mesiba, meaning "party" in Hebrew, offers Levantine sharing plates in a sophisticated (and ironically quite calm) space with plants. Then there's Bar Bedford with a garden, and rooftop bar LilliStar with a deck offering incredible skyline views.

There are also three meeting spaces, a co-working table and fitness centre. **BT**

VERDICT

This playful hotel is designed for social adventures and late nights, rather than sleep and work. You'll spot a younger crowd here, who come for co-working, cocktails and dancing the night away at Jolene Sound Room.

BEST FOR

A buzzy base in Brooklyn

DON'T MISS

Pillowy frena bread and butterflied sea bass at Mesiba

PRICE
From US$234 per night

CONTACT
353 Bedford Avenue,
Brooklyn, New York 11211;
+1 718 782 6699; marriott.com

IMAGES **COURTESY OF MARRIOTT**

CAR **Review**

WORDS
JEREMY TAYLOR

Mercedes-Benz AMG GT 63

The roomier four-door coupé offers comfort and performance

The Mercedes-Benz AMG GT 63 features a redesigned grille and front bumper

Background
Mercedes has revealed an enticing sports car to rival the class-leading Porsche 911.

While the two-door AMG GT is fast, it crucially lacks any practicalities. Drivers who need extra space should opt for the GT's larger sibling instead. This luxurious GT four-door coupé is a long-distance cruiser with supercar performance but packs enough room for four adults.

What's it like?
While the roomy 456-litre boot is marginally smaller than that of a Porsche Panamera, the Mercedes offers plenty of luggage storage.

Raise the rear-seat centre armrest and it's also possible to squeeze in an extra passenger for short trips.

Powered by the same 4.0-litre V-8 engine as the two-door, the coupé is equally fast, racing from zero to 62 mph in 3.2 seconds and on to a top speed just shy of 200 mph.

Mix in standard four-wheel drive for extra grip plus adjustable air suspension and the GT becomes a formidable machine.

Features
A fast-shifting, nine-speed gearbox allowed me to toggle between Sport+ and the various comfort modes, depending on road conditions.

Inside, the advanced cockpit has a suite of driver aids to take the strain out of freeway travel. The assistance systems are simple to operate and can help steer, accelerate and brake the GT, easing the pain of a long-distance haul. **BT**

GOOD-TO-KNOW

The coupé is equipped for track use, with a built-in lap counter

VERDICT

If the GT 63 has one downside it's the styling – there's little to differentiate it from the more mundane Mercedes CLS. Otherwise, this is a fast, roomy and well-built coupé for the enthusiastic driver that also cocoons passengers in supreme comfort.

COST

Prices start from £156,555; mercedes-benz.co.uk

BEST FOR

Merging the zippy performance of a sports vehicle with the comfort of a saloon

IMAGES **MERCEDEZ-BENZ AG**

WORDS
ANNIE HARRIS

Kanishka by Atul Kochhar, London

Pan-Indian flavours take centre stage at this sophisticated Mayfair spot

What's it like?
Located in the heart of Mayfair, Kanishka offers a refined and memorable dining experience, with acclaimed chef Atul Kochhar blending Indian culinary traditions with a modern British twist. As you step inside, the restaurant sets a tone of luxury and sophistication, with twinkling mirrored walls and modern portraits. The ambiance is equally inviting and intimate, perfect for both special occasions and relaxed evenings out.

Food and drink
The experience began with Kanishka's signature cocktail – the fruity and subtly spiced Tandoori pineapple rum punch – preparing my tastebuds for the seven-course tasting menu.

Traditionally you might pair Indian food with a chilled Riesling or fresh Chardonnay, but I was encouraged to try mango wine from the Rhythm Winery in India. I was dubious at first, but what a discovery! It has a perfect balance of sweetness and acidity that will offset bold savoury flavours as well as complement delicate sweet spices.

As the tasting menu progresses, each course builds on the last, with increasing complexity and depth of flavour. Dishes ranged from Jal Tarang, a dish of tender plump scallops with chicken jus, hazelnuts and crispy chicken skin, to chicken tikka pie – the ultimate union of east meets west. The final main course, Do Tarike ka Gosht, featured perfectly cooked lamb chop and lamb loin with wilted Swiss chard, served with a delicately spiced jus and a creamy moreish dhal.

Alphonso
RHYTHM
WINERY

Next up was the 'textures of yoghurt' palate cleanser – a crisp shard of tangy meringue atop a perfect sphere of frozen yoghurt – followed by cardamon chai crème brûlée with custard – a delicious fusion finale to a glorious meal.

Service
The knowledgeable staff guided us through each course, explaining the origin and inspiration behind the dishes. Each course was carefully portioned, ensuring that you could fully appreciate the diversity of the menu without feeling overwhelmed.

Would I go again? Yes, and I won't be waiting for a special occasion. **BT**

VERDICT

Whether you're a connoisseur of Indian food or simply want to indulge in a world-class dining experience, the tasting menu at Kanishka is an absolute must-try. It's more than just a meal; it's an exploration of a lesser-known side of Indian cuisine, paired with exceptional service.

COST

Tasting menu £120, plus £80 for wine pairing

CONTACT

17-19 Maddox Street,
Mayfair, London W1S 2QH; 0203 667 9990;
kanishkarestaurant.co.uk

GOOD -TO- KNOW

Atul Kochhar is the first Indian chef to earn a Michelin star

Do Tarike ka Gosht – lamb chop and lamb loin with a creamy, moreish dhal

IMAGES ANNIE HARRIS

Business Traveller Awards through the ages

As we celebrate our 40th year, we speak to managing director Julian Gregory about past events, glamorous guests and headline-making incidents

I THINK THE MOST important thing about the *Business Traveller* awards is its history. These awards have been going for four decades. Not many publishing companies were doing award events back then. These days, everyone seems to be doing them – people buy a ticket to attend (or to win!), it's heavily sponsored, and the publishing house makes huge amounts of money from it. That's not the way we do things.

These awards were genuinely started to give our readers the chance to recognise companies who provide a great service. And for us, as the go-between the reader and the airline or hotel, a chance to celebrate the industry's achievements. That's why our awards are the way they are – independently verified and by invitation only.

We've had some amazing guests. Princess Diana, Queen Rania of Jordan, Buzz Aldrin, Ivana Trump – who was picked up by Richard Branson at that event and thrown over his shoulder. That made the news! Over the years, we've also welcomed Sophie Wessex, Duchess of Edinburgh, Michael Portillo, Jo Brand, Ben Fogle and Princess Anne (more than once). Over in Asia we've had Fidel V. Ramos, former president of the Philippines, while the US awards have seen the likes of Sarah Jessica Parker and Jonnie Cash's granddaughter.

Some of these notable guests have come from charities for whom we've raised money over the years, including The Prince's Trust and Save the Children.

The results

There has been some consistency in the results since the start – Singapore Airlines and British Airways have always traditionally done well, but if you look back there's been lots of change too. Ten years ago, Qatar Airways didn't really feature – this year they scooped four awards. Not to mention over the past 40 years, lots of airlines have come and gone, while hotel groups have merged.

Award categories have also changed. This year, ride-hailing and chauffeur categories have been added – reflecting how people are travelling today. We would also love to have a sustainability category, but the reality is that most things on the ESG side aren't easily visible to the customer. A traveller might see bamboo cutlery at their hotel or sign up for carbon-offset policies – but they can't judge the big-ticket items behind-the-scenes.

Updated formats

The awards were always a lunchtime event. But 10-15 years ago, you'd still have a hundred people standing around the bar networking at 6pm. These days that culture has petered off. There's maybe one or two people who can stay for a drink and a chat, but on the whole, people have to rush off and return to their desks.

Because of that, we totally changed the format for 2024 to have an evening function. That way, we could bring back the social, networking aspect that makes the event so worthwhile.

The venue was different this year too. Traditionally, the event has been held in a hotel ballroom – from The Savoy to The Dorchester, the London Hilton Park Lane and, most recently, the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington.

This year, we relocated to The Steel Yard in the City of London – which doubles as a nightclub!

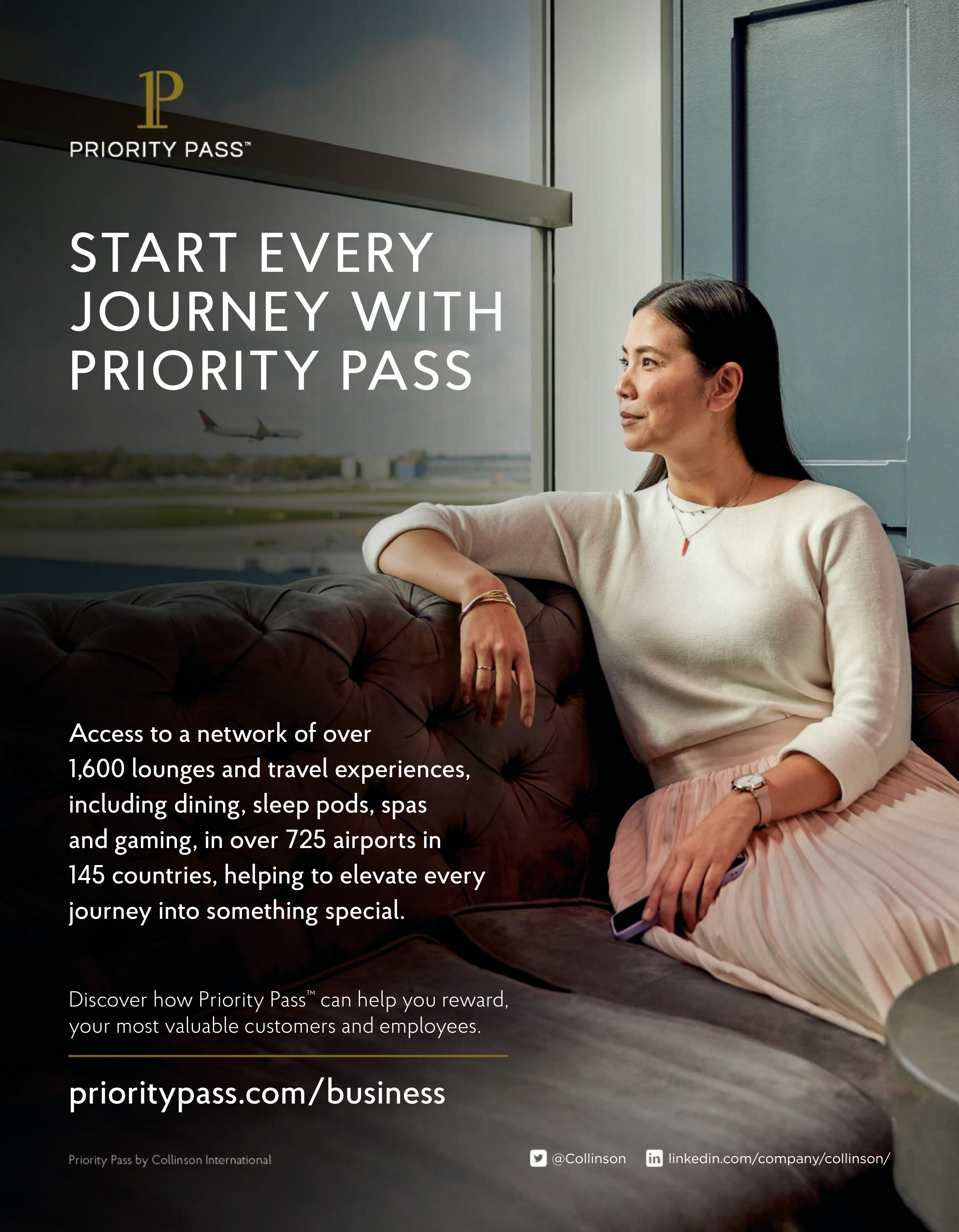
For me, it was a far better experience. Normally, I never get the chance to talk to anyone. I'm busy during the drinks reception, I spend the whole time presenting on stage, and then everyone goes home with awards in tow. This year, we also had TV presenter and correspondent Ben Thompson as the MC for the night, which was fantastic and left plenty of time for networking.

FRIENDS in High Places

TIME MACHINE Princess Diana hands out awards in 1993; famous faces over the years (from Princess Anne to Joan Collins); Branson picks up more than an award

Just prior to the awards, we also unveiled the new look and brand identity of the magazine, and the event really helped to launch that identity and shine a light on all the exciting things to come. In 2025, we can look forward to a new global website, better social media presence, our first podcasts, more video content and a brand new set of award winners – see you there! **BT**

IMAGES STEVE WOOD/POPPERFOTO/GETTY



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